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THE NOVELS, TALES, AND PLAYS
OF JOHN GALSWORTHY

DEVON EDITION

VOLUME XIII

FIVE TALES

By

John Galsworthy

Life calls the tune—we dance

New York
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1927

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The first four stories in this volume are dedicated to André Chevrillon; "A Feud" is dedicated to R. H. Sauter.

J. G.

PREFACE

The long-short story is the best of all forms for fiction, perhaps because it comes to oneself with the least frequency. What dictates the size of the bottle into which we pour our wine—or vinegar? Certainly not deliberate resolution, for then one would have written nothing but stories of from ten to thirty thousand words, instead of only ten tales between those lengths, in five-and-twenty years. Nor, even unconsciously, market considerations, for though neither the British nor the American public favour books of several tales, stories of such length are welcomed and highly paid for in magazines. The whole thing is a puzzle. Why should one have to write a novel when a certain figure, incident, or idea takes possession of the imagination; a short story about a second incident or figure; and a tale of medium length around a third? I cannot answer; but I am convinced that he is in luck to whom the unseen hander-out of bottles offers the pint. Fortune smiled on those short-long masterpieces: "Carmen"; "Torrents of Spring"; "A Lear of the Steppes"; "Un Cœur Simple"; "Boule de Suif";

"Yvette"; "The Madonna of the Future"; "Youth"; "Heart of Darkness"; "Typhoon"; "Ethan Frome"; Stacy Aumonier's "The Friends"; and Katherine Mansfield's "Prelude." When compared with even the best long novels of their respective authors, they are more spontaneous, yet more chiselled and exquisite. And of my own work I think "A Stoic," "The Apple Tree," and "Indian Summer of a Forsyte," at least as fortune-favoured as any of my novels.

The medium length provokes meditation about form. In the novel, form, though highly desirable to prevent sleeping sickness in the reader, has a kind of natural loose-jointedness, and need not be too closely scrutinised. The quite short story is over almost before form is thought of; it is in a way trick-work, where form is at once everything and nothing. The tale of medium length is the magic vehicle for atmospheric drama, or even, now and then, as in the singular and most successful "Prelude," for atmosphere alone. In this medium length the writer of imaginative prose comes nearest to the poet, the painter, the musician. There is room to develop character, but not enough room to develop it at the expense of atmosphere. The tale rises, swells, and closes, like some movement of a symphony. But thereby hangs a query. The old masters of the middle length were tellers of what is called a story—confectioners

of drama. They followed the ultimate laws or conditions of life—birth, full growth, and death. Working to definite conclusion, their tales, though not didactic, had a kind of central meaning or moral. I am not literate enough to know whether before the Russian Tchehov there was any serious modern attempt to tell tales on any other principle, unless it be in Turgenev's Sportsman's sketches—such as, "Byezhin Prairie," that lovely night-piece. But Tchehov brought in, though chiefly in his quite short work, an art of story-telling characterised, one might crudely say, by flatness and vibration, tales which were in a manner of speaking all middle-piece, records of life, without beginning or end, as a man might describe two hours of a summer evening, stopping before the sun went down. This form of art —for art it undoubtedly is—has taken the fancy of many modern writers, with, on the whole, inconsiderable result. Cutting across the main trend of human aptitude, evading that demand for finality, which is so deep in most of us who know that we were born and will have to die, it is not a form which can be employed at will, *at least by people of Western blood. A special temperament, probably, is needed; and one had not seen this form used by an English writer with complete success, until "Prelude" appeared in Katherine Mansfield's volume, "Bliss." I will not call this extraordinary piece of art*

revolutionary, not believing in artistic revolutions, only in the emergence of new figures, around whom the inconsiderable mark a flattering time till some fresh genius—dubious word!—coming on the carpet, draws off their attention. But, if not revolutionary, "Prelude" is triumphant enough to raise the issue of form more seriously than anything Tchehov ever wrote. "Prelude" has practically no beginning, no ending, I would almost say no middle-piece; it has no meaning, no moral, not even the crescendo of an appeal. It is simply a bit of "being in love with life"; and, maybe, life has nothing more really poignant and meaningful than that to give us. It is life on the wing, not so much moving across the sky as quivering and vibrating like a sparrow-hawk, above some succulent vole espied. Whether we are to see any broad development on this line remains a moot point. I do not myself think we shall; the power of exciting adequately by sheer expression of a string of moments, without defined aim or shape, is too rare a gift—but the lure of it will be a will-o'-the-wisp to many.

"Five Tales" at least follow the old canons. The book originally included "Indian Summer of a Forsyte," written in the Spring of 1917*; but that story is now diverted to "The Forsyte Saga" of which it forms a part, and "A Feud," written in the early months of* 1921*, replaces it here. "The First*

and the Last," begun in the Autumn of 1913, *was not finished till late in* 1914. *"A Stoic," "The Apple Tree," and "The Juryman" were written in* 1916. *Of these six stories three lay at the back of my mind for a very long time, trying to escape. "The Apple Tree," indeed, owed its genesis to a chance sight of a little Welsh maiden on the hills near Abergwessin in* 1904. *The Stoic's figure began to tease me as far back as* 1910; *as for "Indian Summer"—I knew I should write it some day, soon after "The Man of Property" came out in* 1906. *None of the three, perhaps, are any the worse for having been so long in getting born.*

If I single out "The Apple Tree" to dwell on for a moment, it is because the mood behind that story is perennial. In Spring, in early Autumn too, who does not feel himself haunted, looking upon sky and fields, rocks, trees, and moorlands—haunted by the Spirit of Nature, though he knows there is no such thing, and that what he is haunted by is, in truth, some emanation of his own longings? It was this "haunt" I tried to render in "The Apple Tree," the golden wistfulness one feels in Botticelli's "Primavera," and his "Birth of Venus"; or concreted in the phrase, "The apple tree, the singing, and the gold"; or even in the single word "Glamour." The attempt was foolhardy, perhaps blasphemous, but there is no limit to the Instinct of Ex-

pression when it sets out of an early morning. Only in the evening, after the work is done, by the fireside, with slippered feet up, does it rub its hands a little, then sigh, thinking of the uncapturable.

JOHN GALSWORTHY.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
The First and the Last	1
A Stoic	89
The Apple Tree	235
The Juryman	331
A Feud	367

THE FIRST AND THE LAST

I

"So the last shall be first, and the first last."—Holy Writ.

T was a dark room at that hour of six in the evening, when just the single oil reading-lamp under its green shade let fall a dapple of light over the Turkey carpet; over the covers of books taken out of the bookshelves, and the open pages of the one selected; over the deep blue and gold of the coffee service on the little old stool with its Oriental embroidery. Very dark in the winter, with drawn curtains, many rows of leather-bound volumes, oak-panelled walls and ceiling. So large, too, that the lighted spot before the fire where he sat was just an oasis. But that was what Keith Darrant liked, after his day's work—the hard early morning study of his "cases," the fret and strain of the day in court; it was his rest, these two hours before dinner, with books, coffee, a pipe, and sometimes a nap. In red Turkish slippers and his old brown velvet coat, he was well suited to that framing of glow and darkness. A painter would

have seized avidly on his clear-cut, yellowish face, with its black eyebrows twisting up over eyes—grey or brown, one could hardly tell, and its dark grizzling hair still plentiful, in spite of those daily hours of wig. He seldom thought of his work while he sat there, throwing off with practised ease the strain of that long attention to the multiple threads of argument and evidence to be disentangled—work profoundly interesting, as a rule, to his clear intellect, trained to almost instinctive rejection of all but the essential, to selection of what was legally vital out of the mass of confused tactical and human detail presented to his scrutiny; yet sometimes tedious and wearing. As for instance to-day, when he had suspected his client of perjury, and was almost convinced that he must throw up his brief. He had disliked the weak-looking, white-faced fellow from the first, and his nervous, shifty answers, his prominent startled eyes—a type too common in these days of canting tolerations and weak humanitarianism; no good, no good!

Of the three books he had taken down, a volume of Voltaire—curious fascination that Frenchman had, for all his destructive irony!—a volume of Burton's travels, and Stevenson's "New Arabian Nights," he had pitched upon the last. He felt, that evening, the want of something seda-

tive, a desire to rest from thought of any kind. The court had been crowded, stuffy; the air, as he walked home, soft, sou'-westerly, charged with coming moisture, no quality of vigour in it; he felt relaxed, tired, even nervy, and for once the loneliness of his house seemed strange and comfortless.

Lowering the lamp, he turned his face towards the fire. Perhaps he would get a sleep before that boring dinner at the Tellasson's. He wished it were vacation, and Maisie back from school. A widower for many years, he had lost the habit of a woman about him; yet to-night he had a positive yearning for the society of his young daughter, with her quick ways, and bright, dark eyes. Curious what perpetual need of a woman some men had! His brother Laurence—wasted—all through women—atrophy of will-power! A man on the edge of things; living from hand to mouth; his gifts all down at heel! One would have thought the Scottish strain might have saved him; and yet, when a Scotsman did begin to go downhill, who could go faster? Curious that their mother's blood should have worked so differently in her two sons. He himself had always felt he owed all his success to it.

His thoughts went off at a tangent to a certain issue troubling his legal conscience. He had not

wavered in the usual assumption of omniscience, but he was by no means sure that he had given right advice. Well! Without that power to decide and hold to decision in spite of misgiving, one would never have been fit for one's position at the Bar, never have been fit for anything. The longer he lived, the more certain he became of the prime necessity of virile and decisive action in all the affairs of life. A word and a blow—and the blow first! Doubts, hesitations, sentiment—the muling and puking of this twilight age——! And there welled up on his handsome face a smile that was almost devilish—the tricks of firelight are so many! It faded again in sheer drowsiness; he slept. . . .

He woke with a start, having a feeling of something out beyond the light, and without turning his head said: "What's that?" There came a sound as if somebody had caught his breath. He turned up the lamp.

"Who's there?"

A voice over by the door answered:

"Only I—Larry."

Something in the tone, or perhaps just being startled out of sleep like this, made him shiver. He said:

"I was asleep. Come in!"

It was noticeable that he did not get up, or

even turn his head, now that he knew who it was, but waited, his half-closed eyes fixed on the fire, for his brother to come forward. A visit from Laurence was not an unmixed blessing. He could hear him breathing, and became conscious of a scent of whisky. Why could not the fellow at least abstain when he was coming here! It was so childish, so lacking in any sense of proportion or of decency! And he said sharply:

"Well, Larry, what is it?"

It was always something. He often wondered at the strength of that sense of trusteeship, which kept him still tolerant of the troubles, amenable to the petitions of this brother of his; or was it just "blood" feeling, a Highland sense of loyalty to kith and kin; an old-time quality which judgment and half his instincts told him was weakness but which, in spite of all, bound him to the distressful fellow? Was he drunk now, that he kept lurking out there by the door? And he said less sharply:

"Why don't you come and sit down?"

He was coming now, avoiding the light, skirting along the walls just beyond the radiance of the lamp, his feet and legs to the waist brightly lighted, but his face disintegrated in shadow, like the face of a dark ghost.

"Are you ill, man?"

Still no answer, save a shake of that head, and the passing up of a hand, out of the light, to the ghostly forehead under the dishevelled hair. The scent of whisky was stronger now; and Keith thought:

'He really is drunk. Nice thing for the new butler to see! If he can't behave——'

The figure against the wall heaved a sigh—so truly from an overburdened heart that Keith was conscious with a certain dismay of not having yet fathomed the cause of this uncanny silence. He got up, and, back to the fire, said with a brutality born of nerves rather than design:

'What is it, man? Have you committed a murder, that you stand there dumb as a fish?"

For a second no answer at all, not even of breathing; then, just the whisper:

"Yes."

The sense of unreality which so helps one at moments of disaster enabled Keith to say vigorously:

"By Jove! You *have* been drinking!"

But it passed at once into deadly apprehension.

"What do you mean? Come here, where I can see you. What's the matter with you, Larry?"

With a sudden lurch and dive, his brother left the shelter of the shadow, and sank into a chair

in the circle of light. And another long, broken sigh escaped him.

"There's nothing the matter with me, Keith! It's true!"

Keith stepped quickly forward, and stared down into his brother's face; and instantly he saw that it *was* true. No one could have simulated the look in those eyes—of horrified wonder, as if they would never again get on terms with the face to which they belonged. To see them squeezed the heart—only real misery could look like that. Then that sudden pity became angry bewilderment.

"What in God's name is this nonsense?"

But it was significant that he lowered his voice; went over to the door, too, to see if it were shut. Laurence had drawn his chair forward, huddling over the fire—a thin figure, a worn, highcheek-boned face with deep-sunk blue eyes, and wavy hair all ruffled, a face that still had a certain beauty. Putting a hand on that lean shoulder, Keith said:

"Come, Larry! Pull yourself together, and drop exaggeration."

"It's true, I tell you; I've killed a man."

The noisy violence of that outburst acted like a *douche*. What was the fellow about—shouting out such words! But suddenly Laurence lifted his

hands and wrung them. The gesture was so utterly painful that it drew a quiver from Keith's face.

"Why did you come here," he said, "and tell *me* this?"

Larry's face was really unearthly sometimes, such strange gleams passed up on to it!

"Whom else should I tell? I came to know what I'm to do, Keith? Give myself up, or what?"

At that sudden introduction of the practical Keith felt his heart twitch. Was it then as real as all that? But he said, very quietly:

"Just tell me—— How did it come about, this —affair?"

That question linked the dark, gruesome, fantastic nightmare on to actuality.

"When did it happen?"

"Last night."

In Larry's face there was—there had always been—something childishly truthful. He would never stand a chance in court! And Keith said:

"How? Where? You'd better tell me quietly from the beginning. Drink this coffee; it'll clear your head."

Laurence took the little blue cup and drained it.

"Yes," he said. "It's like this, Keith. There's a girl I've known for some months now——"

Women! And Keith said between his teeth: "Well?"

"Her father was a Pole who died over here when she was sixteen, and left her all alone. A man called Walenn, a mongrel American, living in the same house, married her, or pretended to—she's very pretty, Keith—he left her with a baby six months old, and another coming. That one died, and she did nearly. Then she starved till another fellow took her on. She lived with him two years; then Walenn turned up again, and made her go back to him. The brute used to beat her black and blue, all for nothing. Then he left her again. When I met her she'd lost her elder child, too, and was taking anybody who came along."

He suddenly looked up into Keith's face.

"But I've never met a sweeter woman, nor a truer, that I swear. Woman! She's only twenty now! When I went to her last night, that brute—that Walenn—had found her out again; and when he came for me, swaggering and bullying —— Look!"—he touched a dark mark on his forehead—"I took his throat in my hands, and when I let go——"

"Yes?"

"Dead. I never knew till afterwards that she was hanging on to him behind."

Again he made that gesture—wringing his hands.

In a hard voice Keith said:

"What did you do then?"

"We sat by it a long time. Then I carried it on my back down the street, round a corner to an archway."

"How far?"

"About fifty yards."

"Was anyone—did anyone see?"

"No."

"What time?"

"Three."

"And then?"

"Went back to her."

"Why—in Heaven's name?"

"She was lonely and afraid; so was I, Keith."

"Where is this place?"

"Forty-two, Borrow Street, Soho."

"And the archway?"

"Corner of Glove Lane."

"Good God! Why—I saw it in the paper!"

And seizing the journal that lay on his bureau, Keith read again that paragraph: "The body of a man was found this morning under an archway

in Glove Lane, Soho. From marks about the throat grave suspicions of foul play are entertained. The body had apparently been robbed, and nothing was discovered leading to identification."

It was real earnest, then. Murder! His own brother! He faced round and said:

"You saw this in the paper, and dreamed it. Understand—you dreamed it!"

The wistful answer came:

"If only I had, Keith—if only I had!"

In his turn, Keith very nearly wrung his hands.

"Did you take anything from the—body?"

"This dropped while we were struggling."

It was an empty envelope with a South American post-mark addressed: "Patrick Walenn, Simon's Hotel, Farrier Street, London." Again with that twitching in his heart, Keith said:

"Put it in the fire."

Then suddenly he stooped to pluck it out. By that command—he had—identified himself with this—this—— But he did not pluck it out. It blackened, writhed, and vanished. And once more he said:

"What in God's name made you come here and tell *me?*"

"You know about these things. I didn't mean

to kill him. I love the girl. What shall I do, Keith?"

Simple! How simple! To ask what he was to do! It was like Larry! And he said:

"You were not seen, you think?"

"It's a dark street. There was no one about."

"When did you leave this girl the second time?"

"About seven o'clock."

"Where did you go?"

"To my rooms."

"In Fitzroy Street?"

"Yes."

"Did anyone see you come in?"

"No."

"What have you done since?"

"Sat there."

"Not been out?"

"No."

"Not seen the girl?"

"No."

"You don't know, then, what she's done since?"

"No."

"Would she give you away?"

"Never."

"Would she give herself away—hysteria?"

"No."

"Who knows of your relations with her?"

"No one."

"No one?"

"I don't know who should, Keith."

"Did anyone see you going in last night, when you first went to her?"

"No. She lives on the ground floor. I've got keys."

"Give them to me. What else have you that connects you with her?"

"Nothing."

"In your rooms?"

"No."

"No photographs. No letters?"

"No."

"Be careful."

"Nothing."

"No one saw you going back to her the second time?"

"No."

"No one saw you leave her in the morning?"

"No."

"You were fortunate. Sit down again, man. I must think."

Think! Think out this accursed thing—so beyond all thought, and all belief. But he could not think. Not a coherent thought would come. And he began again:

"Was it his first reappearance with her?"

"Yes."

"She told you so?"

"Yes."

"How did he find out where she was?"

"I don't know."

"How drunk were you?"

"I was not drunk."

"How much had you drunk?"

"About a bottle of claret—nothing."

"You say you didn't mean to kill him?"

"No—God knows!"

"That's something. What made you choose the arch?"

"It was the first dark place."

"Did his face look as if he had been strangled?"

"Don't!"

"Did it?"

"Yes."

"Very disfigured?"

"Yes."

"Did you look to see if his clothes were marked?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Why not? My God! If you had done it——!"

"You say he was disfigured. Would he be recognisable?"

"I don't know."

"When she lived with him last—where was that?"

"I don't know for certain. Pimlico, I think."

"Not Soho?"

"No."

"How long has she been at the Soho place?"

"Nearly a year."

"Always the same rooms?"

"Yes."

"Is there anyone living in that house or street who would be likely to know her as his wife?"

"I don't think so."

"What was he?"

"I should think he was a professional 'bully.'"

"I see. Spending most of his time abroad, then?"

"Yes."

"Do you know if he was known to the police?"

"I haven't heard of it."

"Now, listen, Larry. When you leave here go straight home, and don't go out till I come to you, to-morrow morning. Promise that!"

"I promise."

"I've got a dinner engagement. I'll think this out. Don't drink. Don't talk! Pull yourself together."

"Don't keep me longer than you can help, Keith!"

That white face, those eyes, that shaking hand! With a twinge of pity in the midst of all the turbulence of his revolt, and fear, and disgust Keith put his hand on his brother's shoulder, and said:

"Courage!"

And suddenly he thought: 'My God! Courage! I shall want it all myself!'

II

Laurence Darrant, leaving his brother's house in the Adelphi, walked northwards, rapidly, slowly, rapidly again. For, if there are men who by force of will do one thing only at a time, there are men who from lack of will do now one thing, now another, with equal intensity. To such natures, to be gripped by the Nemesis which attends the lack of self-control is no reason for being more self-controlled. Rather does it foster their pet feeling: "What matter? To-morrow we die!" The effort of will required to go to Keith had relieved, exhausted and exasperated him. In accordance with those three feelings was the progress of his walk. He started from the door with the fixed resolve to go home and stay there quietly till Keith came. He was in Keith's hands,

Keith would know what was to be done. But he had not gone three hundred yards before he felt so utterly weary, body and soul, that if he had but had a pistol in his pocket he would have shot himself in the street. Not even the thought of the girl—this young unfortunate with her strange devotion, who had kept him straight these last five months, who had roused in him a depth of feeling he had never known before—would have availed against that sudden black dejection. Why go on—a waif at the mercy of his own nature, a straw blown here and there by every gust which rose in him? Why not have done with it for ever, and take it out in sleep?

He was approaching the fatal street, where he and the girl, that early morning, had spent the hours clutched together, trying in the refuge of love to forget for a moment their horror and fear. Should he go in? He had promised Keith not to. Why had he promised? He caught sight of himself in a chemist's lighted window. Miserable, shadowy brute! And he remembered suddenly a dog he had picked up once in the streets of Pera, a black-and-white creature—different from the other dogs, not one of their breed, a pariah of pariahs, who had strayed there somehow. He had taken it home to the house where he was staying, contrary to all custom of the country; had got

fond of it; had shot it himself, sooner than leave it behind again to the mercies of its own kind in the streets. Twelve years ago! And those sleeve-links made of little Turkish coins he had brought back for the girl at the hairdresser's in Chancery Lane where he used to get shaved—pretty creature, like a wild rose. He had asked of her a kiss for payment. What queer emotion when she put her face forward to his lips—a sort of passionate tenderness and shame, at the softness and warmth of that flushed cheek, at her beauty and trustful gratitude. She would soon have given herself to him—that one! He had never gone there again! And to this day he did not know why he had abstained; to this day he did not know whether he were glad or sorry not to have plucked that rose. He must surely have been very different then! Queer business, life—queer, queer business!—to go through it never knowing what you would do next. Ah! to be like Keith, steady, buttoned-up in success; a brass pot, a pillar of society! Once, as a boy, he had been within an ace of killing Keith, for sneering at him. Once in Southern Italy he had been near killing a driver who was flogging his horse. And now, that dark-faced, swinish bully who had ruined the girl he had grown to love—he had done it! Killed him! Killed a man!

He who did not want to hurt a fly. The chemist's window comforted him with the sudden thought that he had at home that which made him safe, in case they should arrest him. He would never again go out without some of those little white tablets sewn into the lining of his coat. Restful, even exhilarating thought! They said a man should not take his own life. Let *them* taste horror—those glib citizens! Let them live as that girl had lived, as millions lived all the world over, under their canting dogmas! A man might rather even take his life than watch their cursed inhumanities.

He went into the chemist's for a bromide; and, while the man was mixing it, stood resting one foot like a tired horse. The "life" he had squeezed out of that fellow! After all, a billion living creatures gave up life each day, had it squeezed out of them, mostly. And perhaps not one a day deserved death so much as that loathly fellow. Life! a breath—a flame! Nothing! Why, then, this icy clutching at his heart?

The chemist brought the draught.

"Not sleeping, sir?"

"No."

The man's eyes seemed to say: 'Yes! Burning the candle at both ends—I know!' Odd life, a chemist's; pills and powders all day long, to hold

the machinery of men together! Devilish odd trade!

In going out he caught the reflection of his face in a mirror; it seemed too good altogether for a man who had committed murder. There was a sort of brightness underneath, an amiability lurking about its shadows; how—how could it be the face of a man who had done what he had done? His head felt lighter now, his feet lighter; he walked rapidly again.

Curious feeling of relief and oppression all at once! Frightful—to long for company, for talk, for distraction; and—to be afraid of it! The girl—the girl and Keith were now the only persons who would not give him that feeling of dread. And, of those two—Keith was not——! Who could consort with one who was never wrong, a successful, righteous fellow; a chap built so that he knew nothing about himself, wanted to know nothing, a chap all solid actions? To be a quicksand swallowing up one's own resolutions was bad enough! But to be like Keith—all willpower, marching along, treading down his own feelings and weaknesses!—— No! One could not make a comrade of a man like Keith, even if he were one's brother? The only creature in all the world was the girl. She alone knew and felt what he was feeling; would put up with him and love

him whatever he did, or was done to him. He stopped and took shelter in a doorway, to light a cigarette.

He had suddenly a fearful wish to pass the archway where he had placed the body; a fearful wish that had no sense, no end in view, no anything; just an insensate craving to see the dark place again. He crossed Borrow Street to the little lane. There was only one person visible, a man on the far side with his shoulders hunched against the wind; a short, dark figure which crossed and came towards him in the flickering lamplight. What a face! Yellow, ravaged, clothed almost to the eyes in a stubbly greyish growth of beard, with blackish teeth, and haunting bloodshot eyes. And what a figure of rags—one shoulder higher than the other, one leg a little lame, and thin! A surge of feeling came up in Laurence for this creature, more unfortunate than himself. There were lower depths than his!

"Well, brother," he said, "*you* don't look too prosperous!"

The smile which gleamed out on the man's face seemed as unlikely as a smile on a scarecrow.

"Prosperity doesn't come my way," he said in a rusty voice. "I'm a failure—always been a failure. And yet—you wouldn't think it, would you? —I was a minister of religion once."

Laurence held out a shilling. But the man shook his head.

"Keep your money," he said. "I've got more than you to-day, I daresay. But thank you for taking a little interest. That's worth more than money to a man that's down."

"You're right."

"Yes," the rusty voice went on; "I'd as soon die as go on living as I do. And now I've lost my self-respect. Often wondered how long a starving man could go without losing his self-respect. Not so very long. You take my word for that." And without the slightest change in the monotony of that creaking voice he added:

"Did you read of the murder? Just here. I've been looking at the place."

The words: 'So have I!' leaped up to Laurence's lips; he choked them down with a sort of terror.

"I wish you better luck," he said. "Good-night!" and hurried away. A sort of ghastly laughter was forcing its way up in his throat. Was everyone talking of the murder he had committed? Even the very scarecrows?

III

There are some natures so constituted that, due to be hung at ten o'clock, they will play chess at eight. Such men invariably rise. They make especially good bishops, editors, judges, impresarios, Prime ministers, money-lenders, and generals; in fact, fill with exceptional credit any position of power over their fellow-men. They have spiritual cold storage, in which are preserved their nervous systems. In such men there is little or none of that fluid sense and continuity of feeling known under those vague terms, speculation, poetry, philosophy. Men of facts and of decision switching imagination on and off at will, subordinating sentiment to reason . . . one does not think of them when watching wind ripple over cornfields, or swallows flying.

Keith Darrant had need for being of that breed during his dinner at the Tellassons. It was just eleven when he issued from the big house in Portland Place and refrained from taking a cab. He wanted to walk that he might better think. What crude and wanton irony there was in his situation! To have been made father-confessor to a murderer, he—well on towards a judgeship! With his contempt for the kind of weakness which landed men in such abysses, he felt it all so

sordid, so "impossible," that he could hardly bring his mind to bear on it at all. And yet he must, because of two powerful instincts—self-preservation and blood-loyalty.

The wind had still the sapping softness of the afternoon, but rain had held off so far. It was warm, and he unbuttoned his fur overcoat. The nature of his thoughts deepened the dark austerity of his face, whose thin, well-cut lips were always pressing together, as if, by meeting, to dispose of each thought as it came up. He moved along the crowded pavements glumly. That air of festive conspiracy which drops with the darkness on to lighted streets, galled him. He turned off on a darker route.

This ghastly business! Convinced of its reality, he yet could not see it. The thing existed in his mind, not as a picture, but as a piece of irrefutable evidence. Larry had not meant to do it, of course. But it was murder, all the same. Men like Larry—weak, impulsive, sentimental, introspective creatures—did they ever mean what they did? This man, this Walenn, was, by all accounts, better dead than alive; no need to waste a thought on him! But, crime—the ugliness—Justice unsatisfied! Crime concealed—and his own share in the concealment! And yet—brother to brother! Surely no one could demand action from

him! It was only a question of what he was going to advise Larry to do. To keep silent, and disappear? Had that a chance of success? Perhaps—if the answers to his questions had been correct. But this girl! Suppose the dead man's relationship to her were ferreted out, could she be relied on not to endanger Larry? These women were all the same, unstable as water, emotional, shiftless—pests of society. Then, too, a crime untracked, dogging all his brother's after life; a secret following him wherever he might vanish to; hanging over him, watching for some drunken moment, to slip out of his lips. It was bad to think of. A clean breast of it? But his heart twitched within him. "Brother of Mr. Keith Darrant, the well-known King's Counsel"—visiting a woman of the town, strangling with his bare hands the woman's husband! No intention to murder, but—a dead man! A dead man carried out of the house, laid under a dark archway! Provocation! Recommended to mercy—penal servitude for life! Was that the advice he was going to give Larry to-morrow morning?

And he had a sudden vision of shaven men with clay-coloured features, run, as it were, to seed, as he had seen them once in Pentonville, when he had gone there to visit a prisoner. Larry! Whom, as a baby creature, he had watched strad-

dling; whom, as a little fellow, he had fagged; whom he had seen through scrapes at college; to whom he had lent money time and again, and time and again admonished in his courses. Larry! Five years younger than himself; and committed to his charge by their mother when she died. To become for life one of those men with faces like diseased plants; with no hair but a bushy stubble; with arrows marked on their yellow clothes! Larry! One of those men herded like sheep; at the beck and call of common men! A gentleman, his own brother, to live that slave's life, to be ordered here and there, year after year, day in, day out. Something snapped within him. He could not give that advice. Impossible! But if not, he must make sure of his ground, must verify, must know. This Glove Lane—this archway? It would not be far from where he was that very moment. He looked for someone of whom to make enquiry. A policeman was standing at the corner, his stolid face illumined by a lamp; capable and watchful—an excellent officer, no doubt; but, turning his head away, Keith passed him without a word. Strange to feel that cold, uneasy feeling in presence of the law! A grim little driving home of what it all meant! Then, suddenly, he saw that the turning to his left was Borrow Street itself. He walked up one side, crossed over,

and returned. He passed Number Forty-two, a small house with business names printed on the lifeless windows of the first and second floors; with dark curtained windows on the ground floor, or was there just a slink of light in one corner? Which way had Larry turned? Which way under that grisly burden? Fifty paces of this squalid street—narrow, and dark, and empty, thank heaven! Glove Lane! Here it was! A tiny runlet of a street. And here——! He had run right on to the arch, a brick bridge connecting two portions of a warehouse, and dark indeed.

"That's right, gov'nor! That's the place!" He needed all his self-control to turn leisurely to the speaker. "'Ere's where they found the body—very spot—leanin' up 'ere. They ain't got 'im yet. Lytest—me lord!"

It was a ragged boy holding out a tattered yellowish journal. His lynx eyes peered up from under lanky wisps of hair, and his voice had the proprietary note of one making "a corner" in his news. Keith took the paper and gave him twopence. He even found a sort of comfort in the young ghoul's hanging about there; it meant that others besides himself had come morbidly to look. By the dim lamplight he read: "Glove Lane garrotting mystery. Nothing has yet been discovered of the murdered man's identity; from the

cut of his clothes he is supposed to be a foreigner." The boy had vanished, and Keith saw the figure of a policeman coming slowly down this gutter of a street. A second's hesitation, and he stood firm. Nothing obviously could have brought him here save this "mystery," and he stayed quietly staring at the arch. The policeman moved up abreast. Keith saw that he was the one whom he had passed just now. He noted the cold offensive question die out of the man's eyes when they caught the gleam of white shirt-front under the opened fur collar. And holding up the paper, he said:

"Is this where the man was found?"

"Yes, sir."

"Still a mystery, I see?"

"Well, we can't always go by the papers. But I don't fancy they do know much about it, yet."

"Dark spot. Do fellows sleep under here?"

The policeman nodded. "There's not an arch in London where we don't get 'em sometimes."

"Nothing found on him—I think I read?"

"Not a copper. Pockets inside out. There's some funny characters about this quarter. Greeks, Hitalians—all sorts."

Queer sensation this, of being glad of a policeman's confidential tone!

"Well, good-night!"

"Good-night, sir. Good-night!"

He looked back from Borrow Street. The policeman was still standing there holding up his lantern, so that its light fell into the archway, as if trying to read its secret.

Now that he had seen this dark, deserted spot, the chances seemed to him much better. "Pockets inside out!" Either Larry had had presence of mind to do a very clever thing, or someone had been at the body before the police found it. That was the more likely. A dead backwater of a place. At three o'clock—loneliest of all hours—Larry's five minutes' grim excursion to and fro might well have passed unseen! Now, it all depended on the girl; on whether Laurence had been seen coming to her or going away; on whether, if the man's relationship to her were discovered, she could be relied on to say nothing. There was not a soul in Borrow Street now; hardly even a lighted window; and he took one of those rather desperate decisions only possible to men daily accustomed to the instant taking of responsibility. He would go to her, and see for himself. He came to the door of Forty-two, obviously one of those which are only shut at night, and tried the larger key. It fitted, and he was in a gas-lighted passage, with an oil-clothed floor, and a single door to his

left. He stood there undecided. She must be made to understand that he knew everything. She must not be told more than that he was a friend of Larry's. She must not be frightened, yet must be forced to give her very soul away. A hostile witness—not to be treated as hostile—a matter for delicate handling! But his knock was not answered.

Should he give up this nerve-racking, bizarre effort to come at a basis of judgment; go away, and just tell Laurence that he could not advise him? And then—what? Something *must* be done. He knocked again. Still no answer. And with that impatience of being thwarted, natural to him, and fostered to the full by the conditions of his life, he tried the other key. It worked, and he opened the door. Inside all was dark, but a voice from some way off, with a sort of breathless relief in its foreign tones, said:

"Oh! then it's you, Larry! Why did you knock? I was so frightened. Turn up the light, dear. Come in!"

Feeling by the door for a switch in the pitch blackness he was conscious of arms round his neck, a warm thinly clad body pressed to his own; then withdrawn as quickly, with a gasp, and the most awful terror-stricken whisper:

"Oh! Who is it?"

With a glacial shiver down his own spine, Keith answered:

"A friend of Laurence. Don't be frightened!"

There was such silence that he could hear a clock ticking, and the sound of his own hand passing over the surface of the wall, trying to find the switch. He found it, and in the light which leaped up he saw, stiffened against a dark curtain evidently screening off a bedroom, a girl standing, holding a long black coat together at her throat, so that her face with its pale brown hair, short and square-cut and curling up underneath, had an uncanny look of being detached from any body. Her face was so alabaster pale that the staring, startled eyes, dark blue or brown, and the faint rose of the parted lips, were like colour stainings on a white mask; and it had a strange delicacy, truth, and pathos, such as only suffering brings. Though not susceptible to æsthetic emotion, Keith was curiously affected. He said gently:

"You needn't be afraid. I haven't come to do you harm—quite the contrary. May I sit down and talk?" And, holding up the keys, he added: "Laurence wouldn't have given me these, would he, if he hadn't trusted me?"

Still she did not move, and he had the impres-

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sion that he was looking at a spirit—a spirit startled out of its flesh. Nor at the moment did it seem in the least strange that he should conceive such an odd thought. He stared round the room —clean and tawdry, with its tarnished gilt mirror, marble-topped side-table, and plush-covered sofa. Twenty years and more since he had been in such a place. And he said:

'Won't you sit down? I'm sorry to have startled you."

But still she did not move, whispering:

"Who are you, please?"

And, moved suddenly beyond the realm of caution by the terror in that whisper, he answered:

"Larry's brother."

She uttered a little sigh of relief which went to Keith's heart, and, still holding the dark coat together at her throat, came forward and sat down on the sofa. He could see that her feet, thrust into slippers, were bare; with her short hair, and those candid startled eyes, she looked like a tall child. He drew up a chair and said:

"You must forgive me coming at such an hour; he's told me, you see."

He expected her to flinch and gasp; but she only clasped her hands together on her knees, and said:

"Yes?"

Then horror and discomfort rose up in him, afresh.

"An awful business!"

Her whisper echoed him:

"Yes, oh! yes! Awful—it is awful!"

And suddenly realising that the man must have fallen dead just where he was sitting, Keith became stock silent, staring at the floor.

'Yes," she whispered; "just there. I see him now always falling!"

How she said that! With what a strange gentle despair! In this girl of evil life, who had brought on them this tragedy, what was it which moved him to a sort of unwilling compassion?

"You look very young," he said.

"I am twenty."

"And you are fond of—my brother?"

"I would die for him."

Impossible to mistake the tone of her voice, or the look in her eyes, true deep Slav eyes; dark brown, not blue as he had thought at first. It was a very pretty face—either her life had not eaten into it yet, or the suffering of these last hours had purged away those marks; or perhaps this devotion of hers to Larry. He felt strangely at sea, sitting there with this child of twenty; he, over forty, a man of the world, professionally used to

every side of human nature. But he said, stammering a little:

"I—I have come to see how far you can save him. Listen, and just answer the questions I put to you."

She raised her hands, squeezed them together, and murmured:

"Oh! I will answer anything."

"This man, then—your—your husband—was he a bad man?"

"A dreadful man."

"Before he came here last night, how long since you saw him?"

"Eighteen months."

"Where did you live when you saw him last?"

"In Pimlico."

"Does anybody about here know you as Mrs. Walenn?"

"No. When I came here, after my little girl died, I came to live a bad life. Nobody knows me at all. I am quite alone."

"If they discover who he was, they will look for his wife?"

"I do not know. He did not let people think I was married to him. I was very young; he treated many, I think, like me."

"Do you think he was known to the police?"

She shook her head. "He was very clever."

"What is your name now?"

"Wanda Livinska."

"Were you known by that name before you were married?"

"Wanda is my Christian name. Livinska—I just call myself."

"I see; since you came here."

"Yes."

"Did my brother ever see this man before last night?"

"Never."

"You had told him about his treatment of you?"

"Yes. And that man first went for him."

"I saw the mark. Do you think anyone saw my brother come to you?"

"I do not know. He says not."

"Can you tell if anyone saw him carrying the —the thing away?"

"No one in this street—I was looking."

"Nor coming back?"

"No one."

"Nor going out in the morning?"

"I do not think it."

"Have you a servant?"

"Only a woman who comes at nine in the morning for an hour."

"Does she know Larry?"

"No."

"Friends, acquaintances?"

"No; I am very quiet. And since I knew your brother, I see no one. Nobody comes here but him for a long time now."

"How long?"

"Five months."

"Have you been out to-day?"

"No."

"What have you been doing?"

"Crying."

It was said with a certain dreadful simplicity, and pressing her hands together, she went on:

"He is in danger, because of me. I am so afraid for him."

Holding up his hand to check that emotion, he said:

"Look at me!"

She fixed those dark eyes on him, and in her bare throat, from which the coat had fallen back, he could see her resolutely swallowing down her agitation.

"If the worst comes to the worst, and this man is traced to you, can you trust yourself not to give my brother away?"

Her eyes shone. She got up and went to the fireplace:

"Look! I have burned all the things he has

given me—even his picture. Now I have nothing from him."

Keith, too, got up.

"Good! One more question: Do the police know you, because—because of your life?"

She shook her head, looking at him intently, with those mournfully true eyes. And he felt a sort of shame.

"I was obliged to ask. Do you know where he lives?"

"Yes."

"You must not go there. And he must not come to you, here."

Her lips quivered; but she bowed her head. Suddenly he found her quite close to him, speaking almost in a whisper:

"Please do not take him from me altogether. I will be so careful. I will not do anything to hurt him; but if I cannot see him sometimes, I shall die. Please do not take him from me." And catching his hand between her own, she pressed it desperately. It was several seconds before Keith said:

"Leave that to me. I will see him. I shall arrange. You must leave that to me."

"But you will be kind?"

He felt her lips kissing his hand. And the soft moist touch sent a queer feeling through him,

protective, yet just a little brutal, having in it a shiver of sensuality. He withdrew his hand. And as if warned that she had been too pressing, she recoiled humbly. But suddenly she turned, and stood absolutely rigid; then almost inaudibly whispered: "Listen! Someone out—out there!" And darting past him she turned out the light.

Almost at once came a knock on the door. He could feel—actually feel the terror of this girl beside him in the dark. And he, too, felt terror. Who could it be? No one came but Larry, she had said. Who else then could it be? Again came the knock, louder! He felt the breath of her whisper on his cheek: "If it is Larry! I must open." He shrank back against the wall; heard her open the door and say faintly: "Yes. Please! Who?"

Light painted a thin moving line on the wall opposite, and a voice which Keith recognised answered:

"All right, miss. Your outer door's open here. You ought to keep it shut after dark."

God! That policeman! And it had been his own doing, not shutting the outer door behind him when he came in. He heard her say timidly in her foreign voice: "Thank you, sir!" the policeman's retreating steps, the outer door being shut, and felt her close to him again. That something in her youth and strange prettiness which had touched

and kept him gentle, no longer blunted the edge of his exasperation, now that he could not see her. They were all the same, these women; could not speak the truth! And he said brusquely:

"You told me they didn't know you!"

Her voice answered like a sigh:

"I did not think they did, sir. It is so long I was not out in the town, not since I had Larry."

The repulsion which all the time seethed deep in Keith welled up at those words. His brother—son of *his* mother, a gentleman—the property of this girl, bound to her, body and soul, by this unspeakable event! But she had turned up the light. Had she some intuition that darkness was against her? Yes, she *was* pretty with that soft face, colourless save for its lips and dark eyes, with that face somehow so touchingly, so unaccountably good, and like a child's.

"I am going now," he said. "Remember! He mustn't come here; you mustn't go to him. I shall see him to-morrow. If you are as fond of him as you say—take care, take care!"

She sighed out, "Yes! oh, yes!" and Keith went to the door. She was standing with her back to the wall, and to follow him she only moved her head—that dove-like face with all its life in eyes which seemed saying: 'Look into us; nothing we hide; all—all is there!'

And he went out.

In the passage he paused before opening the outer door. He did not want to meet that policeman again; the fellow's round should have taken him well out of the street by now, and turning the handle cautiously, he looked out. No one in sight. He stood a moment, wondering if he should turn to right or left, then briskly crossed the street. A voice to his right hand said:

"Good-night, sir."

There in the shadow of a doorway the policeman was standing. The fellow must have seen him coming out! Utterly unable to restrain a start, and muttering "Good-night!" Keith walked on rapidly.

He went full quarter of a mile before he lost that startled and uneasy feeling in sardonic exasperation that he, Keith Darrant, had been taken for a frequenter of a lady of the town. The whole thing—the whole thing!—a vile and disgusting business! His very mind felt dirty and breathless; his spirit, drawn out of sheath, had slowly to slide back before he could at all focus and readjust his reasoning faculty. Certainly, he had got the knowledge he wanted. There was less danger than he thought. That girl's eyes! No mistaking her devotion. She would not give Larry away. Yes! Larry must clear out—South

America—the East—it did not matter. But he felt no relief. The cheap, tawdry room had wrapped itself round his fancy with its atmosphere of murky love, with the feeling it inspired, of emotion caged within those yellowish walls and the red stuff of its furniture. That girl's face! Devotion; truth, too, and beauty, rare and moving, in its setting of darkness and horror, in that nest of vice and of disorder! . . . The dark archway; the street arab, with his gleeful: "They 'ain't got 'im yet!"; the feel of those bare arms round his neck; that whisper of horror in the darkness; above all, again, her child face looking into his, so truthful! And suddenly he stood quite still in the street. What in God's name was he about? What grotesque juggling amongst shadows, what strange and ghastly eccentricity was all this? The forces of order and routine, all the actualities of his daily life, marched on him at that moment, and swept everything before them. It was a dream, a nightmare—not real! It was ridiculous! That he—*he* should thus be bound up with things so black and bizarre!

He had come by now to the Strand, that street down which every day he moved to the Law Courts, to his daily work; his work so dignified and regular, so irreproachable, and solid. No! The thing was all a monstrous nightmare! It

would go, if he fixed his mind on the familiar objects around, read the names on the shops, looked at the faces passing. Far down the thoroughfare he caught the outline of the old church, and beyond, the loom of the Law Courts themselves. The bell of a fire-engine sounded, and the horses came galloping by, with the shining metal, rattle of hoofs and hoarse shouting. Here was a sensation, real and harmless, dignified and customary! A woman flaunting round the corner looked up at him, and leered out: "Good-night!" Even that was customary, tolerable. Two policemen passed, supporting between them a man the worse for liquor, full of fight and expletives; the sight was soothing, an ordinary thing which brought passing annoyance, interest, disgust. It had begun to rain; he felt it on his face with pleasure—an actual thing, not eccentric, a thing which happened every day!

He began to cross the street. Cabs were going at furious speed now that the last omnibus had ceased to run; it distracted him to take this actual, ordinary risk run so often every day. During that crossing of the Strand, with the rain in his face and the cabs shooting past, he regained for the first time his assurance, shook off this unreal sense of being in the grip of something, and walked resolutely to the corner of his home turn-

ing. But passing into that darker stretch, he again stood still. A policeman had also turned into that street on the other side. Not—surely not——! Absurd! They were all alike to look at —those fellows! Absurd! He walked on sharply, and let himself into his house. But on his way upstairs he could not for the life of him help raising a corner of a curtain and looking from the staircase window. The policeman was marching solemnly, about twenty-five yards away, paying apparently no attention to anything whatever.

IV

Keith woke at five o'clock, his usual hour, without remembrance. But the grisly shadow started up when he entered his study, where the lamp burned, and the fire shone, and the coffee was set ready, just as when yesterday afternoon Larry had stood out there against the wall. For a moment he fought against realisation; then, drinking off his coffee, sat down sullenly at the bureau to his customary three hours' study of the day's cases.

Not one word of his brief could he take in. It was all jumbled with murky images and apprehensions, and for full half an hour he suffered mental paralysis. Then the sheer necessity of knowing something of the case which he had to

open at half-past ten that morning forced him to a concentration which never quite subdued the *malaise* at the bottom of his heart. Nevertheless, when he rose at half-past eight and went into the bathroom, he had earned his grim satisfaction in this victory of will-power. By half-past nine he must be at Larry's. A boat left London for the Argentine to-morrow. If Larry was to get away at once, money must be arranged for. And then at breakfast he came on this paragraph in the paper:

"SOHO MURDER.

"Enquiry late last night established the fact that the Police have discovered the identity of the man found strangled yesterday morning under an archway in Glove Lane. An arrest has been made."

By good fortune he had finished eating, for the words made him feel physically sick. At this very minute Larry might be locked up, waiting to be charged—might even have been arrested before his own visit to the girl last night. If Larry were arrested, she must be implicated. What, then, would be his own position? Idiot to go and look at that archway, to go and see the girl! Had that policeman really followed him home? Accessory after the fact! Keith Darrant, King's Counsel,

man of mark! He forced himself by an effort, which had something of the heroic, to drop this panicky feeling. Panic never did good. He must face it, and see. He refused even to hurry, calmly collected the papers wanted for the day, and attended to a letter or two, before he set out in a taxi-cab to Fitzroy Street.

Waiting outside there in the grey morning for his ring to be answered, he looked the very picture of a man who knew his mind, a man of resolution. But it needed all his will-power to ask without tremor: "Mr. Darrant in?" to hear without sign of any kind the answer: "He's not up yet, sir."

"Never mind; I'll go in and see him. Mr. Keith Darrant."

On his way to Laurence's bedroom, in the midst of utter relief, he had the self-possession to think: 'This arrest is the best thing that could have happened. It'll keep their noses on a wrong scent till Larry's got away. The girl must be sent off too, but not with him.' Panic had ended in quite hardening his resolution. He entered the bedroom with a feeling of disgust. The fellow was lying there, his bare arms crossed behind his tousled head, staring at the ceiling, and smoking one of many cigarettes whose ends littered a chair beside him, whose sickly reek tainted the

air. That pale face, with its jutting cheek-bones and chin, its hollow cheeks and blue eyes far sunk back—what a wreck of goodness!

He looked up at Keith through the haze of smoke and said quietly: "Well, brother, what's the sentence? 'Transportation for life, and then to be fined forty pounds?'"

The flippancy revolted Keith. It was Larry all over! Last night horrified and humble, this morning, "Don't care" and feather-headed. He said sourly:

"Oh! You can joke about it now?"

Laurence turned his face to the wall.

"Must."

Fatalism! How detestable were natures like that!

"I've been to see her," he said.

"You?"

"Last night. She can be trusted."

Laurence laughed.

"That I told you."

"I had to see for myself. You must clear out at once, Larry. She can come out to you by the next boat; but you can't go together. Have you any money?"

"No."

"I can foot your expenses, and lend you a year's income in advance. But it must be a clean

cut; after you get out there your whereabouts must only be known to me."

A long sigh answered him.

"You're very good to me, Keith; you've always been very good. I don't know why."

Keith answered drily:

"Nor I. There's a boat to the Argentine tomorrow. You're in luck; they've made an arrest. It's in the paper."

"What?"

The cigarette end dropped, the thin pyjama'd figure writhed up and stood clutching at the bed-rail.

"What?"

The disturbing thought flitted through Keith's brain: 'I was a fool. He takes it queerly; what now?'

Laurence passed his hand over his forehead, and sat down on the bed.

"I hadn't thought of that," he said; "It does me!"

Keith stared. In his relief that the arrested man was not Laurence, this had not occurred to him. What folly!

"Why?" he said quickly; "an innocent man's in no danger. They always get the wrong man first. It's a piece of luck, that's all. It gives us time."

How often had he not seen that expression on Larry's face, wistful, questioning, as if trying to see the thing with his—Keith's—eyes, trying to submit to better judgment? And he said, almost gently:

"Now, look here, Larry; this is too serious to trifle with. Don't worry about that. Leave it to me. Just get ready to be off. I'll take your berth and make arrangements. Here's some money for kit. I can come round between five and six, and let you know. Pull yourself together, man. As soon as the girl's joined you out there, you'd better get across to Chile, the further the better. You must simply lose yourself. I must go now, if I'm to get to the Bank before I go down to the courts." And looking very steadily at his brother, he added:

"Come! You've got to think of me in this matter as well as of yourself. No playing fast and loose with the arrangements. Understand?"

But still Larry gazed up at him with that wistful questioning, and not till he had repeated, "Understand?" did he receive "Yes" for answer.

Driving away, he thought: 'Queer fellow! I don't know him, shall never know him!' and at once began to concentrate on the practical arrangements. At his bank he drew out £400; but waiting for the notes to be counted he suffered

qualms. A clumsy way of doing things! If there had been more time! The thought: 'Accessory after the fact!' now infected everything. Notes were traceable. No other way of getting him away at once, though. One must take lesser risks to avoid greater. From the bank he drove to the office of the steamship line. He had told Larry he would book his passage. But that would not do! He must only ask anonymously if there were accommodation. Having discovered that there were vacant berths, he drove on to the Law Courts. If he could have taken a morning off, he would have gone down to the police court and seen them charge this man. But even that was not too safe, with a face so well known as his. What would come of this arrest? Nothing, surely! The police always took somebody up, to keep the public quiet. Then, suddenly, he had again the feeling that it was all a nightmare; Larry had never done it; the police had got the right man! But instantly the memory of the girl's awe-stricken face, her figure huddling on the sofa, her words: "I see him always falling!" came back. God! What a business!

He felt he had never been more clear-headed and forcible than that morning in court. When he came out for lunch he bought the most sensational of the evening papers. But it was yet too

early for news, and he had to go back into court no whit wiser concerning the arrest. When at last he threw off wig and gown, and had got through a conference and other necessary work, he went out to Chancery Lane, buying a paper on the way. Then he hailed a cab, and drove once more to Fitzroy Street.

V

Laurence had remained sitting on his bed for many minutes. An innocent man in no danger! Keith had said it—the celebrated lawyer! Could he rely on that? Go out 8,000 miles, he and the girl, and leave a fellow-creature perhaps in mortal peril for an act committed by himself?

In the past night he had touched bottom, as he thought: become ready to face anything. When Keith came in he would without murmur have accepted the advice: "Give yourself up!" He was prepared to pitch away the end of his life as he pitched from him the fag-ends of his cigarettes. And the long sigh he had heaved, hearing of reprieve, had been only half relief. Then, with incredible swiftness there had rushed through him a feeling of unutterable joy and hope. Clean away—into a new country, a new life! The girl and he! Out there he wouldn't care, would rejoice even to have squashed the life out of such a

noisome beetle of a man. Out there! Under a new sun, where blood ran quicker than in this foggy land, and people took justice into their own hands. For it had been justice on that brute even though he had not meant to kill him. And then to hear of this arrest! They would be charging the man to-day. He could go and see the poor creature accused of the murder he himself had committed! And he laughed. Go and see how likely it was that they might hang a fellow-man in place of himself? He dressed, but too shaky to shave himself, went out to a barber's shop. While there he read the news which Keith had seen. In this paper the name of the arrested man was given: "John Evan, no address." To be brought up on the charge at Bow Street. Yes! He must go. Once, twice, three times he walked past the entrance of the court before at last he entered and screwed himself away among the tag and bobtail.

The court was crowded; and from the murmurs round he could tell that it was his particular case which had brought so many there. In a dazed way he watched charge after charge disposed of with lightning quickness. But were they never going to reach his business? And then suddenly he saw the little scarecrow man of last night advancing to the dock between two policemen, more ragged and miserable than ever by light of

day, like some shaggy, wan, grey animal, surrounded by sleek hounds.

A sort of satisfied purr was rising all round; and with horror Laurence perceived that this—*this* was the man accused of what he himself had done—this queer, battered unfortunate to whom he had shown a passing friendliness. Then all feeling merged in the appalling interest of listening. The evidence was very short. Testimony of the hotel-keeper where Walenn had been staying, the identification of his body, and of a snake-shaped ring he had been wearing at dinner that evening. Testimony of a pawnbroker, that this same ring was pawned with him the first thing yesterday morning by the prisoner. Testimony of a policeman that he had noticed the man Evan several times in Glove Lane, and twice moved him on from sleeping under that arch. Testimony of another policeman that, when arrested at midnight, Evan had said: "Yes; I took the ring off his finger. I found him there dead. . . . I know I oughtn't to have done it. . . . I'm an educated man; it was stupid to pawn the ring. I found him with his pockets turned inside out."

Fascinating and terrible to sit staring at the man in whose place he should have been; to wonder when those small bright-grey bloodshot eyes would spy him out, and how he would meet that

glance. Like a baited raccoon the little man stood, screwed back into a corner, mournful, cynical, fierce, with his ridged, obtuse yellow face, and his stubbly grey beard and hair, and his eyes wandering now and again amongst the crowd. But with all his might Laurence kept his face unmoved. Then came the word "Remanded"; and, more like a baited beast than ever, the man was led away.

Laurence sat on, a cold perspiration thick on his forehead. Someone else, then, had come on the body and turned the pockets inside out before John Evan took the ring. A man such as Walenn would not be out at night without money. Besides, if Evan had found money on the body he would never have run the risk of taking that ring. Yes, someone else had come on the body first. It was for that one to come forward, and prove that the ring was still on the dead man's finger when he left him, and thus clear Evan. He clung to that thought; it seemed to make him less responsible for the little man's position; to remove him and his own deed one step further back. If they found the person who had taken the money, it would prove Evan's innocence. He came out of the court in a sort of trance. And a craving to get drunk attacked him. One could not go on like this without the relief of some oblivion. If he could only get

drunk, keep drunk till this business was decided and he knew whether he must give himself up or no. He had now no fear at all of people suspecting him; only fear of himself—fear that he might go and give himself up. Now he could see the girl; the danger from that was as nothing compared with the danger from his own conscience. He had promised Keith not to see her. Keith had been decent and loyal to him—good old Keith! But he would never understand that this girl was now all he cared about in life; that he would rather be cut off from life itself than be cut off from her. Instead of becoming less and less, she was becoming more and more to him—experience strange and thrilling! Out of deep misery she had grown happy—through him; out of a sordid, shifting life recovered coherence and bloom, through devotion to him—*him*, of all people in the world! It was a miracle. She demanded nothing of him, adored him, as no other woman ever had—it was this which had anchored his drifting barque; this—and her truthful mild intelligence, and that burning warmth of a woman, who, long treated by men as but a sack of sex, now loves at last.

And suddenly, mastering his craving to get drunk, he made towards Soho. He had been a fool to give those keys to Keith. She must have been frightened by his visit; and, perhaps, doubly

miserable since, knowing nothing, imagining everything! Keith was sure to have terrified her. Poor little thing!

Down the street where he had stolen in the dark with the dead body on his back, he almost ran for the cover of her house. The door was opened to him before he knocked, her arms were round his neck, her lips pressed to his. The fire was out, as if she had been unable to remember to keep warm. A stool had been drawn to the window, and there she had evidently been sitting, like a bird in a cage, looking out into the grey street. Though she had been told that he was not to come, instinct had kept her there; or the pathetic, aching hope against hope which lovers never part with.

Now that he was there, her first thoughts were for his comfort. The fire was lighted. He must eat, drink, smoke. There was never in her doings any of the "I am doing this for you, but you ought to be doing that for me" which belongs to so many marriages, and *liaisons*. She was like a devoted slave, so in love with the chains that she never knew she wore them. And to Laurence, who had so little sense of property, this only served to deepen tenderness, and the hold she had on him. He had resolved not to tell her of the new danger he ran from his own conscience. But resolutions

with him were but the opposites of what was sure to come; and at last the words:

"They've arrested someone," escaped him.

From her face he knew she had grasped the danger at once; had divined it, perhaps, before he spoke. But she only twined her arms round him and kissed his lips. And he knew that she was begging him to put his love for her above his conscience. Who would ever have thought that he could feel as he did to this girl who had been in the arms of many! The stained and suffering past of a loved woman awakens in some men only chivalry; in others, more respectable, it rouses a tigerish itch, a rancorous jealousy of what in the past was given to others. Sometimes it will do both. When he had her in his arms he felt no remorse for killing the coarse, handsome brute who had ruined her. He savagely rejoiced in it. But when she laid her head in the hollow of his shoulder, turning to him her white face with the faint colour-staining on the parted lips, the cheeks, the eyelids; when her dark, wide-apart, brown eyes gazed up in the happiness of her abandonment—he felt only tenderness and protection.

He left her at five o'clock, and had not gone two streets' length before the memory of the little grey vagabond, screwed back in the far corner of the dock like a baited raccoon, of his

dreary, creaking voice, took possession of him again; and a kind of savagery mounted in his brain against a world where one could be so tortured without having meant harm to anyone.

At the door of his lodgings Keith was getting out of a cab. They went in together, but neither of them sat down; Keith standing with his back to the carefully shut door, Laurence with his back to the table, as if they knew there was a tug coming. And Keith said:

"There's room on that boat. Go down and book your berth before they shut. Here's the money!"

"I'm going to stick it, Keith."

Keith stepped forward, and put a roll of notes on the table.

"Now look here, Larry. I've read the police court proceedings. There's nothing in that. Out of prison, or in prison for a few weeks, it's all the same to a night-bird of that sort. Dismiss it from your mind—there's not nearly enough evidence to convict. This gives you your chance. Take it like a man, and make a new life for yourself."

Laurence smiled; but the smile had a touch of madness and a touch of malice. He took up the notes.

"Clear out, and save the honour of brother Keith. Put them back in your pocket, Keith, or

I'll put them in the fire. Come, take them!" And, crossing to the fire, he held them to the bars. "Take them, or in they go!"

Keith took back the notes.

"I've still got some kind of honour, Keith; if I clear out I shall have none, not the rag of any, left. It may be worth more to me than that—I can't tell yet—I can't tell."

There was a long silence before Keith answered.

"I tell you you're mistaken; no jury will convict. If they did, a judge would never hang on it. A ghoul who can rob a dead body *ought* to be in prison. What he did is worse than what you did, if you come to that!"

Laurence lifted his face.

"Judge not, brother," he said; "the heart is a dark well."

Keith's yellowish face grew red and swollen, as though he were mastering the tickle of a bronchial cough.

"What are you going to do, then? I suppose I may ask you not to be entirely oblivious of our name; or is such a consideration unworthy of your honour?"

Laurence bent his head. The gesture said more clearly than words: 'Don't kick a man when he's down!'

"I don't know what I'm going to do—nothing at present. I'm awfully sorry, Keith; awfully sorry."

Keith looked at him, and without another word went out.

VI

To any, save philosophers, reputation may be threatened almost as much by disgrace to name and family as by the disgrace of self. Keith's instinct was always to deal actively with danger. But this blow, whether it fell on him by discovery or by confession, could not be countered. As blight falls on a rose from who knows where, the scandalous murk would light on him. No repulse possible! Not even a wriggling from under! Brother of a murderer hung or sent to penal servitude! His daughter niece to a murderer! His dead mother—a murderer's mother! And to wait day after day, week after week, not knowing whether the blow would fall, was an extraordinarily atrocious penance, the injustice of which, to a man of rectitude, seemed daily the more monstrous.

The remand had produced evidence that the murdered man had been drinking heavily on the night of his death, and further evidence of the accused's professional vagabondage and destitu-

tion; it was shown, too, that for some time the archway in Glove Lane had been his favourite night haunt. He had been committed for trial in January. This time, despite misgivings, Keith had attended the police court. To his great relief Larry was not there. But the policeman who had come up while he was looking at the archway, and given him afterwards that scare in the girl's rooms, was chief witness to the way the accused man haunted Glove Lane. Though Keith held his silk hat high, he still had the uncomfortable feeling that the man had recognised him.

His conscience suffered few, if any, twinges for letting this man rest under the shadow of the murder. He genuinely believed that there was not evidence enough to convict; nor was it in him to appreciate the tortures of a vagabond shut up. The scamp deserved what he had got, for robbing a dead body; and in any case such a scarecrow was better off in prison than sleeping out under archways in December. Sentiment was foreign to Keith's character, and his justice that of those who subordinate the fates of the weak and shiftless to the needful paramountcy of the strong and well established.

His daughter came back from school for the Christmas holidays. It was hard to look up from her bright eyes and rosy cheeks and see this

shadow hanging above his calm and ordered life, as in a glowing room one's eye may catch an impending patch of darkness drawn like a spider's web across a corner of the ceiling.

On the afternoon of Christmas Eve they went, by her desire, to a church in Soho, where the Christmas Oratorio was being given; and coming away passed, by chance of a wrong turning, down Borrow Street. Ugh! How that startled moment, when the girl had pressed herself against him in the dark, and her terror-stricken whisper: "Oh! Who is it?" leaped out before him! Always that business—that ghastly business! After the trial he would have another try to get them both away. And he thrust his arm within his young daughter's, hurrying her on, out of this street where shadows filled all the winter air.

But that evening when she had gone to bed he felt uncontrollably restless. He had not seen Larry for weeks. What was he about? What desperations were hatching in his disorderly brain? Was he very miserable; had he perhaps sunk into a stupor of debauchery? And the old feeling of protectiveness rose up in him; a warmth born of long ago Christmas Eves, when they had stockings hung out in the night stuffed by a Santa Claus, whose hand never failed to tuck them up, whose kiss was their nightly waft into sleep.

Stars were sparkling out there over the river; the sky frosty-clear, and black. Bells had not begun to ring as yet. And obeying an obscure, deep impulse, Keith wrapped himself once more into his fur coat, pulled a motoring cap over his eyes, and sallied forth.

In the Strand he took a cab to Fitzroy Street. There was no light in Larry's windows, and on a card he saw the words "To Let." Gone! Had he after all cleared out for good? But how—without money? And the girl? Bells were ringing now in the silent frostiness. Christmas Eve! And Keith thought: 'If only this wretched business were off my mind! Monstrous that one should suffer for the faults of others!'

He took a route which led him past Borrow Street. Solitude brooded there, and he walked resolutely down on the far side, looking hard at the girl's window. There was a light. The curtains just failed to meet, so that a thin gleam shone through. He crossed; and after glancing swiftly up and down, deliberately peered in.

He only stood there perhaps twenty seconds, but visual records gleaned in a moment sometimes outlast the visions of hours and days. The electric light was not burning; but, in the centre of the room the girl was kneeling in her nightgown before a little table on which were four

lighted candles. Her arms were crossed on her breast; the candle-light shone on her fair cropped hair, on the profile of cheek and chin, on her bowed white neck. For a moment he thought her alone; then behind her saw his brother in a sleeping suit, leaning against the wall, with arms crossed, watching. It was the expression on his face which burned the whole thing in, so that always afterwards he was able to see that little scene—such an expression as could never have been on the face of one even faintly conscious that he was watched by any living thing on earth. The whole of Larry's heart and feeling seemed to have come up out of him. Yearning, mockery, love, despair! The depth of his feeling for this girl, his stress of mind, fears, hopes; the flotsam good and evil of his soul, all transfigured there, exposed and unforgettable. The candle-light shone upward on to his face, twisted by the strangest smile; his eyes, darker and more wistful than mortal eyes should be, seemed to beseech and mock the white-clad girl, who, all unconscious, knelt without movement, like a carved figure of devotion. The words seemed coming from his lips: "Pray for us! Bravo! Yes! Pray for us!" And suddenly Keith saw her stretch out her arms, and lift her face with a look of ecstasy, and Laurence starting forward. What had she

seen beyond the candle flames? It is the unexpected which invests visions with poignancy. Nothing more strange could Keith have seen in this nest of the murky and illicit. But in sheer panic lest he might be caught thus spying he drew back and hurried on.

So Larry was living there with her! When the moment came he could still find him.

Before going in, he stood full five minutes leaning on the terrace parapet before his house, gazing at the star-frosted sky, and the river cut by the trees into black pools, oiled over by gleams from the Embankment lamps. And, deep down, behind his mere thoughts, he ached—somehow, somewhere ached. Beyond the cage of all that he saw and heard and thought, he had perceived something he could not reach. But the night was cold, the bells silent, for it had struck twelve. Entering his house, he stole upstairs.

VII

If for Keith those six weeks before the Glove Lane murder trial came on were fraught with uneasiness and gloom, they were for Laurence almost the happiest since his youth. From the moment when he left his rooms and went to the girl's to live, a kind of peace and exaltation took

possession of him. Not by any effort of will did he throw off the nightmare hanging over him. Nor was he drugged by love. He was in a sort of spiritual catalepsy. In face of fate too powerful for his will, his turmoil, anxiety, and even restlessness had ceased; his life floated in the ether of "what must come, will." Out of this catalepsy, his spirit sometimes fell headlong into black waters. In one such whirlpool he was struggling on the night of Christmas Eve. When the girl rose from her knees he asked her:

"What did you see?"

Pressing close to him, she drew him down on to the floor before the fire; and they sat, knees drawn up, hands clasped, like two children trying to see over the edge of the world.

"It was the Virgin I saw. She stood against the wall and smiled. We shall be happy soon."

"When we die, Wanda," he said, suddenly, "let it be together. We shall keep each other warm, out there."

Huddling to him she whispered: "Yes, oh, yes! If you die, I could not go on living."

It was this utter dependence on him, the feeling that he had rescued something, which gave him sense of anchorage. That, and his buried life in the retreat of these two rooms. Just for an hour in the morning, from nine to ten, the charwoman

would come, but not another soul all day. They never went out together. He would stay in bed late, while Wanda bought what they needed for the day's meals; lying on his back, hands clasped behind his head, recalling her face, the movements of her slim, rounded, supple figure, robing itself before his gaze; feeling again the kiss she had left on his lips, the gleam of her soft eyes, so strangely dark in so fair a face. In a sort of trance he would lie till she came back. Then get up to breakfast about noon off things which she had cooked, drinking coffee. In the afternoon he would go out alone and walk for hours, anywhere, so long as it was East. To the East there was always suffering to be seen, always that which soothed him with the feeling that he and his troubles were only a tiny part of trouble; that while so many other sorrowing and shadowy creatures lived he was not cut off. To go West was to encourage dejection. In the West all was like Keith, successful, immaculate, ordered, resolute. He would come back tired out, and sit watching her cook their little dinner. The evenings were given up to love. Queer trance of an existence, which both were afraid to break. No sign from her of wanting those excitements which girls who have lived her life, even for a few months, are supposed to need. She never asked

him to take her anywhere; never, in word, deed, look, seemed anything but almost rapturously content. And yet he knew, and she knew, that they were only waiting to see whether Fate would turn her thumb down on them. In these days he did not drink. Out of his quarter's money, when it came in, he had paid his debts—their expenses were very small. He never went to see Keith, never wrote to him, hardly thought of him. And from those dread apparitions—Walenn lying with the breath choked out of him, and the little grey, driven animal in the dock—he hid, as only a man can who must hide or be destroyed. But daily he bought a newspaper, and feverishly, furtively scanned its columns.

VIII

Coming out of the Law Courts on the afternoon of January 28th, at the triumphant end of a desperately fought will case, Keith saw on a poster the words: "Glove Lane Murder: Trial and Verdict"; and with a rush of dismay he thought: 'Good God! I never looked at the paper this morning!' The elation which had filled him a second before, the absorption he had felt for two days now in the case so hardly won, seemed suddenly quite sickeningly trivial. What on earth

had he been doing to forget that horrible business even for an instant? He stood quite still on the crowded pavement, unable, really unable, to buy a paper. But his face was like a piece of iron when he did step forward and hold his penny out. There it was in the *Stop Press!* "Glove Lane Murder. The jury returned a verdict of Guilty. Sentence of death was passed."

His first sensation was simple irritation. How had they come to commit such an imbecility? Monstrous! The evidence——! Then the futility of even reading the report, of even considering how they had come to record such a verdict struck him with savage suddenness. There it was, and nothing he could do or say would alter it; no condemnation of this idiotic verdict would help reverse it. The situation was desperate, indeed! That five minutes' walk from the Law Courts to his chambers was the longest he had ever taken.

Men of decided character little know beforehand what they will do in certain contingencies. For the imaginations of decided people do not endow mere contingencies with sufficient actuality. Keith had never really settled what he was going to do if this man were condemned. Often in those past weeks he had said to himself: "Of course, if they bring him in guilty, that's another thing!" But, now that they had, he was beset by

exactly the same old arguments and feelings, the same instincts of loyalty and protection towards Laurence and himself, intensified by the fearful imminence of the danger. And yet, here was this man about to be hung for a thing he had not done! Nothing could get over that! But then he was such a worthless vagabond, a ghoul who had robbed a dead body. If Larry were condemned in his stead, would there be any less miscarriage of justice? To strangle a brute who had struck you, by the accident of keeping your hands on his throat a few seconds too long, was there any more guilt in that—was there even as much, as in deliberate theft from a dead man? Reverence for order, for justice, and established fact, will often march shoulder to shoulder with Jesuitry in natures to whom success is vital.

In the narrow stone passage leading to his staircase, a friend had called out: "Bravo, Darrant! That was a squeak! Congratulations!" And with a bitter little smile Keith thought: 'Congratulations! I!'

At the first possible moment he hurried back to the Strand, and hailing a cab, he told the man to put him down at a turning near to Borrow Street.

It was the girl who opened to his knock. Startled, clasping her hands, she looked strange to Keith in her black skirt and blouse of some

soft velvety stuff the colour of faded roses. Her round, rather long throat was bare; and Keith noticed fretfully that she wore gold earrings. Her eyes, so pitch dark against her white face, and the short fair hair, which curled into her neck, seemed both to search and to plead.

"My brother?"

"He is not in, sir, yet."

"Do you know where he is?"

"No."

"He is living with you here now?"

"Yes."

"Are you still as fond of him as ever, then?"

With a movement, as though she despaired of words, she clasped her hands over her heart. And he said:

"I see."

He had the same strange feeling as on his first visit to her, and when through the chink in the curtains he had watched her kneeling—of pity mingled with some faint sexual emotion. And crossing to the fire he asked:

"May I wait for him?"

"Oh! Please! Will you sit down?"

But Keith shook his head. And with a catch in her breath, she said:

"You will not take him from me. I should die."

He turned round on her sharply.

"*I* don't want him taken from you. I want to help you keep him. Are you ready to go away, at any time?"

"Yes. Oh, yes!"

"And he?"

She answered almost in a whisper:

"Yes; but there is that poor man."

"That poor man is a graveyard thief; a hyena; a ghoul—not worth consideration." And the rasp in his own voice surprised him.

"Ah!" she sighed. "But I am sorry for him. Perhaps he was hungry. I have been hungry—you do things then that you would not. And perhaps he has no one to love; if you have no one to love you can be very bad. I think of him often—in prison."

Between his teeth Keith muttered: "And Laurence?"

"We do never speak of it, we are afraid."

"He's not told you, then, about the trial?"

Her eyes dilated.

"The trial! Oh! He was strange last night. This morning, too, he got up early. Is it—is it over?"

"Yes."

"What has come?"

"Guilty."

For a moment Keith thought she was going to

faint. She had closed her eyes, and swayed so that he took a step, and put his hands on her arms.

"Listen!" he said. "Help me; don't let Laurence out of your sight. We must have time. I must see what they intend to do. They can't be going to hang this man. I must have time, I tell you. You must prevent his giving himself up."

She stood, staring in his face, while he still held her arms, gripping into her soft flesh through the velvety sleeves.

"Do you understand?"

"Yes—but if he has already!"

Keith felt the shiver which ran through her. And the thought rushed into his mind: 'My God! Suppose the police come round while I'm here!' If Larry had indeed gone to them! If that policeman who had seen him here the night after the murder should find him here again just after the verdict! He said almost fiercely:

"Can I trust you not to let Larry out of your sight? Quick! Answer!"

Clasping her hands to her breast, she answered humbly:

"I will try."

"If he hasn't already done this, watch him like a lynx! Don't let him go out without you. I'll come to-morrow morning early. You're a

Catholic, aren't you? Swear to me that you won't let him do anything till he's seen me again."

She did not answer, looking past him at the door; and Keith heard a key in the latch. There was Laurence himself, holding in his hand a great bunch of pink lilies and white narcissi. His face was pale and haggard. He said quietly:

"Hallo, Keith!"

The girl's eyes were fastened on Larry's face; and Keith, looking from one to the other, knew that he had never had more need for wariness.

"Have you seen?" he said.

Laurence nodded. His expression, as a rule so tell-tale of his emotions, baffled Keith utterly.

"Well?"

"I've been expecting it."

"The thing can't stand—that's certain. But I must have time to look into the report. I must have time to see what I can do. D'you understand me, Larry—I must have time." He knew he was talking at random. The only thing was to get them away at once out of reach of confession; but he dared not say so.

"Promise me that you'll do nothing, that you won't go out even till I've seen you to-morrow morning."

Again Laurence nodded. And Keith looked at

the girl. Would she see that he did not break that promise? Her eyes were still fixed immovably on Larry's face. And with the feeling that he could get no further, Keith turned to go.

"Promise me," he said.

Laurence answered: "I promise."

He was smiling. Keith could make nothing of that smile, nor of the expression in the girl's eyes. And saying: "I have your promise, I rely on it!" he went.

IX

To keep from any woman who loves, knowledge of her lover's mood, is as hard as to keep music from moving the heart. But when that woman has lived in suffering, and for the first time knows the comfort of love, then let the lover try as he may to disguise his heart—no use! Yet by virtue of subtler abnegation she will often succeed in keeping it from him that she knows.

When Keith was gone the girl made no outcry, asked no questions, managed that Larry should not suspect her intuition; all that evening she acted as if she knew of nothing preparing within him, and through him, within herself.

His words, caresses, the very zest with which he helped her to prepare the feast, the flowers he had brought, the wine he made her drink, the

avoidance of any word which could spoil their happiness, all—all told her. He was too inexorably gay and loving. Not for her—to whom every word and every kiss had uncannily the desperate value of a last word and kiss—not for her to deprive herself of these by any sign or gesture which might betray her prescience. She took all, and would have taken more, a hundredfold. She did not want to drink the wine he kept tilting into her glass, but, with the acceptance learned by women who have lived her life, she did not refuse. She had never refused him anything.

Laurence drank deeply. The wine gave an edge to these few hours of pleasure, an exaltation of energy. It dulled his sense of pity, too. It was pity he was afraid of—for himself, and for this girl. To make even this tawdry room look beautiful, with firelight and candlelight, dark amber wine in the glasses, tall pink lilies spilling their saffron, exuding their hot perfume—she and even himself must look their best. Not even music was lacking to their feast. Someone was playing a pianola across the street, and the sound, very faint, came stealing—swelling, sinking, festive, mournful; having a far-off life of its own, like the flickering fire-flames before which they lay embraced, or the lilies delicate between the candles. Listening to that music, tracing with his finger

the tiny veins on her breast, he lay like one recovering from a swoon. No parting. None! But sleep, as the firelight sleeps when flames die; as music sleeps on its deserted strings!

And the girl watched him.

It was nearly ten when he bade her go to bed. And after she had gone obedient into the bedroom, he brought ink and paper down by the fire. The drifter, the unstable, the good-for-nothing—did not falter. He had thought, when it came to the point, he would fail himself; but a sort of rage bore him forward. If he lived on, and confessed, they would shut him up, take from him the one thing he loved, cut him off from her; sand up his only well in the desert. Curse them! And he wrote by firelight which mellowed the white sheets of paper; while, against the dark curtain, the girl, in her nightgown, unconscious of the cold, stood watching.

A man, when he drowns, remembers his past. Like the lost poet he had "gone with the wind." Now it was for him to be true in his fashion. A man may falter for weeks and weeks, consciously, subconsciously, even in his dreams, till there comes that moment when the only thing impossible is to go on faltering. The black cap, the little driven grey man looking up at it with a sort of wonder—faltering had ceased!

He had finished now, and was but staring into the fire.

The fire, the candles, and the fire—no more the flame and flicker!

And, by the dark curtain, the girl watched.

X

Keith went, not home, but to his club; and in the room devoted to the reception of guests, empty at this hour, he sat down and read the report of the trial. The fools had made out a case that looked black enough. And for a long time, on the thick soft carpet which let out no sound of footfall, he paced up and down, thinking. He might see the defending counsel, might surely do that as an expert who thought there had been miscarriage of justice. They must appeal; a petition too might be started in the last event. The thing could—must be put right yet, if only Larry and that girl did nothing!

He had no appetite, but the custom of dining is too strong. And while he ate, he glanced with irritation at his fellow-members. They looked so at their ease. Unjust—that this black cloud should hang over one blameless as any of them! Friends, connoisseurs of such things—a judge among them—came specially to his table to ex-

press their admiration of his conduct of that will case. To-night he had real excuse for pride, but he felt none. Yet, in this well-warmed quietly glowing room, filled with decorously eating, decorously talking men, he gained insensibly some comfort. This surely was reality; that shadowy business out there only the drear sound of a wind one must and did keep out—like the poverty and grime which had no real existence for the secure and prosperous. He drank champagne. It helped to fortify reality, to make shadows seem more shadowy. And down in the smoking-room he sat before the fire, in one of those chairs which embalm after-dinner dreams. He grew sleepy there, and at eleven o'clock rose to go home. But when he had once passed down the shallow marble steps, out through the revolving door which let in no draughts, he was visited by fear, as if he had drawn it in with the breath of the January wind. Larry's face; and the girl watching it! Why had she watched like that? Larry's smile; and the flowers in his hand? Buying flowers at such a moment! The girl was his slave—whatever he told her, she would do. But she would never be able to stop him. At this very moment he might be rushing to give himself up!

His hand, thrust deep into the pocket of his fur coat, came in contact suddenly with something

cold. The keys Larry had given him all that time ago. There they had lain forgotten ever since. The chance touch decided him. He turned off towards Borrow Street, walking at full speed. He could but go again and see. He would sleep better if he knew that he had left no stone unturned. At the corner of that dismal street he had to wait for solitude before he made for the house which he now loathed with a deadly loathing. He opened the outer door and shut it to behind him. He knocked, but no one came. Perhaps they had gone to bed. Again and again he knocked, then opened the door, stepped in, and closed it carefully. Candles lighted, the fire burning; cushions thrown on the floor in front of it and strewn with flowers! The table, too, covered with flowers and with the remnants of a meal. Through the half-drawn curtain he could see that the inner room was also lighted. Had they gone out, leaving everything like this? Gone out! His heart beat. Bottles! Larry had been drinking!

Had it really come? Must he go back home with this murk on him; knowing that his brother was a confessed and branded murderer? He went quickly to the half-drawn curtains and looked in. Against the wall he saw a bed, and those two in it. He recoiled in sheer amazement and relief. Asleep with curtains undrawn, lights left on?

Asleep through all his knocking! They must both be drunk. The blood rushed up in his neck. Asleep! And rushing forward again, he called out: "Larry!" Then, with a gasp he went towards the bed. "Larry!" No answer! No movement! Seizing his brother's shoulder, he shook it violently. It felt cold. They were lying in each other's arms, breast to breast, lips to lips, their faces white in the light shining above the dressing-table. And such a shudder shook Keith that he had to grasp the brass rail above their heads. Then he bent down, and wetting his finger, placed it close to their joined lips. No two could ever swoon so utterly as that; not even a drunken sleep could be so fast. His wet finger felt not the faintest stir of air, nor was there any movement in the pulses of their hands. No breath! No life! The eyes of the girl were closed. How strangely innocent she looked! Larry's open eyes seemed to be gazing at her shut eyes; but Keith saw that they were sightless. With a sort of sob he drew down the lids. Then, by an impulse that he could never have explained, he laid a hand on his brother's head, and a hand on the girl's fair hair. The clothes had fallen down a little from her bare shoulder; he pulled them up, as if to keep her warm, and caught the glint of metal; a tiny gilt crucifix no longer than a thumbnail, on a thread

of steel chain, had slipped down from her breast into the hollow of the arm which lay round Larry's neck. Keith buried it beneath the clothes and noticed an envelope pinned to the coverlet; bending down, he read: "Please give this at once to the police.—LAURENCE DARRANT." He thrust it into his pocket. Like elastic stretched beyond its uttermost, his reason, will, faculties of calculation and resolve snapped to within him. He thought with incredible swiftness: 'I must know nothing of this. I must go!' And, almost before he knew that he had moved, he was out again in the street.

He could never have told of what he thought while he was walking home. He did not really come to himself till he was in his study. There, with a trembling hand, he poured himself out whisky and drank it off. If he had not chanced to go there, the charwoman would have found them when she came in the morning, and given that envelope to the police! He took it out. He had a right—a right to know what was in it! He broke it open.

"I, Laurence Darrant, about to die by my own hand, declare that this is a solemn and true confession. I committed what is known as the Glove Lane Murder on the night of November the 27th

last in the following way"—on and on to the last words—"We didn't want to die; but we could not bear separation, and I couldn't face letting an innocent man be hung for me. I do not see any other way. I beg that there may be no *post-mortem* on our bodies. The stuff we have taken is some of that which will be found on the dressing-table. Please bury us together.

"LAURENCE DARRANT.

"*January the 28th*, about ten o'clock p.m."

Full five minutes Keith stood with those sheets of paper in his hand, while the clock ticked, the wind moaned a little in the trees outside, the flames licked the logs with the quiet click and ruffle of their intense far-away life down there on the hearth. Then he roused himself, and sat down to read the whole again.

There it was, just as Larry had told it to him—nothing left out, very clear; even to the addresses of people who could identify the girl as having once been Walenn's wife or mistress. It would convince. Yes! It would convince.

The sheets dropped from his hand. Very slowly he was grasping the appalling fact that on the floor beside his chair lay the life or death of yet another man; that by taking this confession he had taken into his own hands the fate of the vaga-

bond lying under sentence of death; that he could not give him back his life without incurring the smirch of this disgrace, without even endangering himself. If he let this confession reach the authorities, he could never escape the gravest suspicion that he had known of the whole affair during these two months. He would have to attend the inquest, be recognised by that policeman as having come to the archway to see where the body had lain, as having visited the girl the very evening after the murder. Who would believe in the mere coincidence of such visits on the part of the murderer's brother. But apart from that suspicion, the fearful scandal which so sensational an affair must make would mar his career, his life, his young daughter's life! Larry's suicide with this girl would make sensation enough as it was; but nothing to that other. Such a death had its romance; involved him in no way save as a mourner, could perhaps even be hushed up! The other—nothing could hush that up, nothing prevent its ringing to the house-tops. He got up from his chair, and for many minutes roamed the room unable to get his mind to bear on the issue. Images kept starting up before him. The face of the man who handed him wig and gown each morning, puffy and curious, with a leer on it he had never noticed before; his young daughter's

lifted eyebrows, mouth drooping, eyes troubled; the tiny gilt crucifix glinting in the hollow of the dead girl's arm; the sightless look in Larry's unclosed eyes; even his own thumb and finger pulling the lids down. And then he saw a street and endless people passing, turning to stare at him. And, stopping in his tramp, he said aloud: "Let them go to hell! Seven days' wonder!" Was he not trustee to that confession! Trustee! After all he had done nothing to be ashamed of, even if he had kept knowledge dark. A brother! Who could blame him? And he picked up those sheets of paper. But, like a great murky hand, the scandal spread itself about him; its coarse malignant voice seemed shouting: 'Paiper! . . . Paiper! . . . Glove Lane Murder! . . . Suicide and confession of brother of well-known K.C. . . . Well-known K.C.'s brother . . . Murder and suicide . . . Paiper!' Was he to let loose that flood of foulness? Was he, who had done nothing, to smirch his own little daughter's life; to smirch his dead brother, their dead mother—himself, his own valuable, important future? And all for a sewer rat! Let him hang, let the fellow hang if he must! And that was not certain. Appeal! Petition! He might—he should be saved! To have got thus far, and then, by his own action, topple himself down!

With a sudden darting movement he thrust the confession in among the burning coals. And a smile licked at the folds in his dark face, like those flames licking the sheets of paper, till they writhed and blackened. With the toe of his boot he dispersed their scorched and crumbling wafer. Stamp them in! Stamp in that man's life! Burnt! No more doubts, no more of this gnawing fear! Burnt? A man—an innocent—sewer rat! Recoiling from the fire he grasped his forehead. Burning hot.

Well, it was done! Only fools without will or purpose regretted. And suddenly he laughed. So Larry had died for nothing! He had no will, no purpose, and was dead! He and that girl might now have been living, loving each other in the warm night, away at the other end of the world, instead of lying dead in the cold night here! Fools and weaklings regretted, suffered from conscience and remorse. A man trod firmly, held to his purpose, no matter what came of it!

He went to the window and drew back the curtain. What was that? A gibbet in the air, a body hanging? Ah! Only the trees—the dark trees—the winter skeleton trees! Recoiling, he returned to his armchair and sat down before the fire. It had been shining like that, the lamp turned low, his chair drawn up, when Larry came in that

afternoon two months ago. Bah! He had never come at all! It was a nightmare. He had been asleep. How his head burned! And leaping up, he looked at the calendar on his bureau. "January the 28th!" No dream! His face hardened and darkened. On! Not like Larry! On!

1914.

A STOIC

I

1 §

"Aequam memento rebus in arduis
Servare mentem."—HORACE.

IN the City of Liverpool, on a January day of 1905, the Board-room of "The Island Navigation Company" rested, as it were, after the labours of the afternoon. The long table was still littered with the ink, pens, blotting-paper, and abandoned documents of six persons —a deserted battlefield of the brain. And, lonely, in his chairman's seat at the top end old Sylvanus Heythorp sat, with closed eyes, still and heavy as an image. One puffy, feeble hand, whose fingers quivered, rested on the arm of his chair; the thick white hair on his massive head glistened in the light from a green-shaded lamp. He was not asleep, for every now and then his sanguine cheeks filled, and a sound, half sigh, half grunt, escaped his thick lips between a white moustache and the tiny tuft of white hairs above his cleft chin. Sunk in the chair, that square thick trunk

of a body in short black-braided coat seemed divested of all neck.

Young Gilbert Farney, secretary of "The Island Navigation Company," entering his hushed Board-room, stepped briskly to the table, gathered some papers, and stood looking at his chairman. Not more than thirty-five, with the bright hues of the optimist in his hair, beard, cheeks, and eyes, he had a nose and lips which curled ironically. For, in his view, he *was* the Company; and its Board did but exist to chequer his importance. Five days in the week for seven hours a day he wrote, and thought, and wove the threads of its business, and this lot came down once a week for two or three hours, and taught their grandmother to suck eggs. But watching that red-cheeked, white-haired, somnolent figure, his smile was not so contemptuous as might have been expected. For after all, the chairman was a wonderful old boy. A man of go and insight could not but respect him. Eighty! Half paralysed, over head and ears in debt, having gone the pace all his life—or so they said!—till at last that mine in Ecuador had done for him—before the secretary's day, of course, but he had heard of it. The old chap had bought it up on spec'—"*de l'audace, toujours de l'audace*," as he was so fond of saying—paid for it half in cash and half in promises,

and then—the thing had turned out empty, and left him with £20,000 worth of the old shares unredeemed. The old boy had weathered it out without a bankruptcy so far. Indomitable old buffer; and never fussy like the rest of them! Young Farney, though a secretary, was capable of attachment; and his eyes expressed a pitying affection. The Board meeting had been long and "snadgy"—a final settling of that Pillin business. Rum go the chairman forcing it on them like this! And with quiet satisfaction the secretary thought: 'And he never would have got it through if I hadn't made up my mind that it really is good business!' For to expand the company was to expand himself. Still, to buy four ships with the freight market so depressed was a bit startling, and there would be opposition at the general meeting. Never mind! He and the chairman could put it through—put it through. And suddenly he saw the old man looking at him.

Only from those eyes could one appreciate the strength of life yet flowing underground in that well-nigh helpless carcase—deep-coloured little blue wells, tiny, jovial, round windows.

A sigh travelled up through layers of flesh, and he said almost inaudibly:

"Have they come, Mr. Farney?"

"Yes, sir. I've put them in the transfer office;

said you'd be with them in a minute; but I wasn't going to wake you."

"Haven't been asleep. Help me up."

Grasping the edge of the table with his trembling hands, the old man pulled, and, with Farney heaving him behind, attained his feet. He stood about five feet ten, and weighed fully fourteen stone; not corpulent, but very thick all through; his round and massive head alone would have outweighed a baby. With eyes shut, he seemed to be trying to get the better of his own weight, then he moved with the slowness of a barnacle towards the door. The secretary, watching him, thought: 'Marvellous old chap! How he gets about by himself is a miracle! And he can't retire, they say—lives on his fees!'

But the chairman was through the green baize door. At his tortoise gait he traversed the inner office, where the youthful clerks suspended their figuring—to grin behind his back—and entered the transfer office, where eight gentlemen were sitting. Seven rose, and one did not. Old Heythorp raised a saluting hand to the level of his chest and moving to an arm-chair, lowered himself into it.

"Well, gentlemen?"

One of the eight gentlemen got up again.

"Mr. Heythorp, we've appointed Mr. Brown-

bee to voice our views. Mr. Brownbee!" And down he sat.

Mr. Brownbee rose—a stoutish man some seventy years of age, with little grey side whiskers, and one of those utterly steady faces only to be seen in England, faces which convey the sense of business from father to son for generations; faces which make wars, and passion, and free thought seem equally incredible; faces which inspire confidence, and awaken in one a desire to get up and leave the room. Mr. Brownbee rose, and said in a suave voice:

"Mr. Heythorp, we here represent about £14,000. When we had the pleasure of meeting you last July, you will recollect that you held out a prospect of some more satisfactory arrangement by Christmas. We are now in January, and I am bound to say we none of us get younger."

From the depths of old Heythorp a preliminary rumble came travelling, reached the surface, and materialised:

"Don't know about you—feel a boy, myself."

The eight gentlemen looked at him. Was he going to try and put them off again? Mr. Brownbee said with unruffled calm:

"I'm sure we're very glad to hear it. But to come to the point. We have felt, Mr. Heythorp, and I'm sure you won't think it unreasonable,

that—er—bankruptcy would be the most satisfactory solution. We have waited a long time, and we want to know definitely where we stand; for, to be quite frank, we don't see any prospect of improvement; indeed, we fear the opposite."

"You think I'm going to join the majority."

This plumping out of what was at the back of their minds produced in Mr. Brownbee and his colleagues a sort of chemical disturbance. They coughed, moved their feet, and turned away their eyes, till the one who had not risen, a solicitor named Ventnor, said bluffly:

"Well, put it that way if you like."

Old Heythorp's little deep eyes twinkled.

"My grandfather lived to be a hundred; my father ninety-six—both of them rips. I'm only eighty, gentlemen; blameless life compared with theirs."

"Indeed," Mr. Brownbee said, "we hope you have many years of this life before you."

"More of this than of another." And a silence fell, till old Heythorp added: "You're getting a thousand a year out of my fees. Mistake to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. I'll make it twelve hundred. If you force me to resign my directorships by bankruptcy, you won't get a rap, you know."

Mr. Brownbee cleared his throat:

"We think, Mr. Heythorp, you should make it at least fifteen hundred. In that case we might perhaps consider——"

Old Heythorp shook his head.

"We can hardly accept your assertion that we should get nothing in the event of bankruptcy. We fancy you greatly underrate the possibilities. Fifteen hundred a year is the least you can do for us."

"See you d——d first."

Another silence followed, then Ventnor, the solicitor, said irascibly:

"We know where we are, then."

Mr. Brownbee added almost nervously:

"Are we to understand that twelve hundred a year is your—your last word?"

Old Heythorp nodded. "Come again this day month, and I'll see what I can do for you;" and he shut his eyes.

Round Mr. Brownbee six of the gentlemen gathered, speaking in low voices; Mr. Ventnor nursed a leg and glowered at old Heythorp, who sat with his eyes closed. Mr. Brownbee went over and conferred with Mr. Ventnor, then clearing his throat, he said:

"Well, sir, we have considered your proposal; we agree to accept it for the moment. We will come again, as you suggest, in a month's time.

We hope that you will by then have seen your way to something more substantial, with a view to avoiding what we should all regret, but which I fear will otherwise become inevitable."

Old Heythorp nodded. The eight gentlemen took their hats, and went out one by one, Mr. Brownbee courteously bringing up the rear.

The old man, who could not get up without assistance, stayed musing in his chair. He had diddled 'em for the moment into giving him another month, and when that month was up—he would diddle 'em again! A month ought to make the Pillin business safe, with all that hung on it. That poor funkey chap Joe Pillin! A gurgling chuckle escaped his red lips. What a shadow the fellow had looked, trotting in that evening just a month ago, behind his valet's announcement: "Mr. Pillin, sir."

What a parchmenty, precise, threadpaper of a chap, with his bird's claw of a hand, and his muffled-up throat, and his quavery:

"How do you do, Sylvanus? I'm afraid you're not——"

"First rate. Sit down. Have some port."

"Port! I never drink it. Poison to me! Poison!"

"Do you good!"

"Oh! I know, that's what you always say.

You've a monstrous constitution, Sylvanus. If I drank port and smoked cigars and sat up till one o'clock, I should be in my grave to-morrow. I'm not the man I was. The fact is, I've come to see if you can help me. I'm getting old; I'm growing nervous——"

"You always were as chickeny as an old hen, Joe."

"Well, my nature's not like yours. To come to the point, I want to sell my ships and retire. I need rest. Freights are very depressed. I've got my family to think of."

"Crack on, and go broke; buck you up like anything!"

"I'm quite serious, Sylvanus."

"Never knew you anything else, Joe."

A quavering cough, and out it had come:

"Now—in a word—won't your 'Island Navigation Company' buy my ships?"

A pause, a twinkle, a puff of smoke. "Make it worth my while!" He had said it in jest; and then, in a flash, the idea had come to him. Rosamund and her youngsters! What a chance to put something between them and destitution when he had joined the majority! And so he said: "We don't want your silly ships."

That claw of a hand waved in deprecation. "They're very good ships—doing quite well. It's

only my wretched health. If I were a strong man I shouldn't dream——"

"What d'you want for 'em?" Good Lord! how he jumped if you asked him a plain question. The chap was as nervous as a guinea-fowl!

"Here are the figures—for the last four years. I think you'll agree that I couldn't ask less than seventy thousand."

Through the smoke of his cigar old Heythorp had digested those figures slowly, Joe Pillin feeling his teeth and sucking lozenges the while; then he said:

"Sixty thousand! And out of that you pay me ten per cent., if I get it through for you. Take it or leave it."

"My dear Sylvanus, that's almost—cynical."

"Too good a price—you'll never get it without me."

"But a—but a commission! You could never disclose it!"

"Arrange that all right. Think it over. Freights 'll go lower yet. Have some port."

"No, no! Thank you. No! So you think freights will go lower?"

"Sure of it."

"Well, I'll be going. I'm sure I don't know. It's—it's—I must think."

"Think your hardest."

"Yes, yes. Good-bye. I can't imagine how you still go on smoking those things and drinking port."

"See you in your grave yet, Joe." What a feeble smile the poor fellow had! Laugh—he couldn't! And, alone again, he had browsed, developing the idea which had come to him.

Though, to dwell in the heart of shipping, Sylvanus Heythorp had lived at Liverpool twenty years, he was from the Eastern Counties, of a family so old that it professed to despise the Conquest. Each of its generations occupied nearly twice as long as those of less tenacious men. Traditionally of Danish origin, its men folk had as a rule bright reddish-brown hair, red cheeks, large round heads, excellent teeth and poor morals. They had done their best for the population of any county in which they had settled; their offshoots swarmed. Born in the early twenties of the nineteenth century, Sylvanus Heythorp, after an education broken by escapades both at school and college, had fetched up in that simple London of the late forties, where claret, opera, and eight per cent. for your money ruled a cheery roost. Made partner in his shipping firm well before he was thirty, he had sailed with a wet sheet and a flowing tide; dancers, claret, Cliquot, and piquet; a cab with a tiger; some travel—all

that delicious early-Victorian consciousness of nothing save a golden time. It was all so full and mellow that he was forty before he had his only love affair of any depth—with the daughter of one of his own clerks, a *liaison* so awkward as to necessitate a sedulous concealment. The death of that girl, after three years, leaving him a natural son, had been the chief, perhaps the only real, sorrow of his life. Five years later he married. What for? God only knew! as he was in the habit of remarking. His wife had been a hard, worldly, well-connected woman, who presented him with two unnatural children, a girl and a boy, and grew harder, more worldly, less handsome, in the process. The migration to Liverpool, which took place when he was sixty and she forty-two, broke what she still had of heart, but she lingered on twelve years, finding solace in bridge, and being haughty towards Liverpool. Old Heythorp saw her to her rest without regret. He had felt no love for her whatever, and practically none for her two children—they were in his view colourless, pragmatical, very unexpected characters. His son Ernest—in the Admiralty—he thought a poor, careful stick. His daughter Adela, an excellent manager, delighting in spiritual conversation and the society of tame men, rarely failed to show him that she considered him a hopeless heathen.

They saw as little as need be of each other. She was provided for under that settlement he had made on her mother fifteen years ago, well before the not altogether unexpected crisis in his affairs. Very different was the feeling he had bestowed on that son of his "under the rose." The boy, who had always gone by his mother's name of Larne, had on her death been sent to some relations of hers in Ireland, and there brought up. He had been called to the Dublin bar, and married, young, a girl half Cornish and half Irish; presently, having cost old Heythorp in all a pretty penny, he had died impecunious, leaving his fair Rosamund at thirty with a girl of eight and a boy of five. She had not spent six months of widowhood before coming over from Dublin to claim the old man's guardianship. A remarkably pretty woman, like a full-blown rose, with greenish hazel eyes, she had turned up one morning at the offices of "The Island Navigation Company," accompanied by her two children—for he had never divulged to them his private address. And since then they had always been more or less on his hands, occupying a small house in a suburb of Liverpool. He visited them there, but never asked them to the house in Sefton Park, which was in fact his daughter's; so that his proper family and friends were unaware of their existence.

Rosamund Larne was one of those precarious ladies who make uncertain incomes by writing full-bodied storyettes. In the most dismal circumstances she enjoyed a buoyancy bordering on the indecent, which always amused old Heythorp's cynicism. But of his grandchildren Phyllis and Jock (wild as colts) he had become fond. And this chance of getting six thousand pounds settled on them at a stroke had seemed to him nothing but heaven-sent. As things were, if he "went off" —and, of course, he might at any moment, there wouldn't be a penny for them; for he would "cut up" a good fifteen thousand to the bad. He was now giving them some three hundred a year out of his fees; and dead directors unfortunately earned no fees! Six thousand pounds at four and a half per cent., settled so that their mother couldn't "blue it," would give them a certain two hundred and fifty pounds a year—better than beggary. And the more he thought the better he liked it, if only that shaky chap, Joe Pillin, didn't shy off when he'd bitten his nails short over it!

Four evenings later, the "shaky chap" had again appeared at his house in Sefton Park.

"I've thought it over, Sylvanus. I don't like it."

"No; but you'll do it."

"It's a sacrifice. Fifty-four thousand for four

ships—it means a considerable reduction in my income."

"It means security, my boy."

"Well, there is that; but you know, I really can't be party to a secret commission. If it came out, think of my name and goodness knows what."

"It won't come out."

"Yes, yes, so you say, but——"

"All you've got to do's to execute a settlement on some third parties that I'll name. I'm not going to take a penny of it myself. Get your own lawyer to draw it up and make him trustee. You can sign it when the purchase has gone through. I'll trust you, Joe. What stock have you got that gives four and a half per cent.?"

"Midland——"

"That'll do. You needn't sell."

"Yes, but who *are* these people?"

"Woman and her children I want to do a good turn to." What a face the fellow had made! "Afraid of being connected with a woman, Joe?"

"Yes, you may laugh—I *am* afraid of being connected with someone else's woman. I don't like it—I don't like it at all. I've not led your life, Sylvanus."

"Lucky for you; you'd have been dead long

ago. Tell your lawyer it's an old flame of yours—you old dog!"

"Yes, there it is at once, you see. I might be subject to blackmail."

"Tell him to keep it dark, and just pay over the income, quarterly."

"I don't like it, Sylvanus—I don't like it."

"Then leave it, and be hanged to you. Have a cigar?"

"You know I never smoke. Is there no other way?"

"Yes. Sell stock in London, bank the proceeds there, and bring me six thousand pounds in notes. I'll hold 'em till after the general meeting. If the thing doesn't go through, I'll hand 'em back to you."

"No; I like that even less."

"Rather I trusted *you*, eh!"

"No, not at all, Sylvanus, not at all. But it's all playing round the law."

"There's no law to prevent you doing what you like with your money. What I do's nothing to you. And mind you, I'm taking nothing from it—not a mag. You assist the widowed and the fatherless—just your line, Joe!"

"What a fellow you are, Sylvanus; you don't seem capable of taking anything seriously."

"Care killed the cat!"

Left alone after this second interview he had thought: 'The beggar'll jump.'

And the beggar *had*. That settlement was drawn and only awaited signature. The Board to-day had decided on the purchase; and all that remained was to get it ratified at the general meeting. Let him but get that over, and this provision for his grandchildren made, and he would snap his fingers at Brownbee and his crew—the canting humbugs! "Hope you have many years of this life before you!" As if they cared for anything but his money—*their* money rather! And becoming conscious of the length of his reverie, he grasped the arms of his chair, heaved at his own bulk, in an effort to rise, growing redder and redder in face and neck. It was one of the hundred things his doctor had told him not to do for fear of apoplexy, the humbug! Why didn't Farney or one of those young fellows come and help him up? To call out was undignified. But was he to sit there all night? Three times he failed, and after each failure sat motionless again, crimson and exhausted; the fourth time he succeeded, and slowly made for the office. Passing through, he stopped and said in his extinct voice:

"You young gentlemen had forgotten me."

"Mr. Farney said you didn't wish to be disturbed, sir."

"Very good of him. Give me my hat and coat."

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you. What time is it?"

"Six o'clock, sir."

"Tell Mr. Farney to come and see me to-morrow at noon, about my speech for the general meeting."

"Yes, sir."

"Good-night to you."

"Good-night, sir."

At his tortoise gait he passed between the office stools to the door, opened it feebly, and slowly vanished.

Shutting the door behind him, a clerk said:

"Poor old chairman! He's on his last!"

Another answered:

"Gosh! He's a tough old hulk. He'll go down fightin'."

2 §

Issuing from the offices of "The Island Navigation Company," Sylvanus Heythorp moved towards the corner whence he always took tram to Sefton Park. The crowded street had all that prosperous air of catching or missing something which characterises the town where London and New York and Dublin meet. Old Heythorp had to cross to the far side, and he sallied forth with-

out regard to traffic. That snail-like passage had in it a touch of the sublime; the old man seemed saying: "Knock me down and be d——d to you —I'm not going to hurry." His life was saved perhaps ten times a day by the British character at large, compounded of phlegm and a liking to take something under its protection. The tram conductors on that line were especially used to him, never failing to catch him under the arms and heave him like a sack of coals, while with trembling hands he pulled hard at the rail and strap.

"All right, sir?"

"Thank you."

He moved into the body of the tram, where somebody would always get up from kindness and the fear that he might sit down on them; and there he stayed motionless, his little eyes tight closed. With his red face, tuft of white hairs above his square cleft block of shaven chin, and his big high-crowned bowler hat, which yet seemed too petty for his head with its thick hair —he looked like some kind of an idol dug up and decked out in gear a size too small.

One of those voices of young men from public schools and exchanges where things are bought and sold, said:

"How de do, Mr. Heythorp?"

Old Heythorp opened his eyes. That sleek cub, Joe Pillin's son! What a young pup—with his round eyes, and his round cheeks, and his little moustache, his fur coat, his spats, his diamond pin!

"How's your father?" he said.

"Thanks, rather below par, worryin' about his ships. Suppose you haven't any news for him, sir?"

Old Heythorp nodded. The young man was one of his pet abominations, embodying all the complacent, little-headed mediocrity of this new generation; natty fellows all turned out of the same mould, sippers and tasters, chaps without drive or capacity, without even vices; and he did not intend to gratify the cub's curiosity.

"Come to my house," he said; "I'll give you a note for him."

"Tha—anks; I'd like to cheer the old man up."

The old man! Cheeky brat! And closing his eyes he relapsed into immobility. The tram wound and ground its upward way, and he mused. When he was that cub's age—twenty-eight or whatever it might be—he had done most things; been up Vesuvius, driven four-in-hand, lost his last penny on the Derby and won it back on the Oaks, known all the dancers and operatic stars of the day, fought a duel with a Yankee at Dieppe

and winged him for saying through his confounded nose that Old England was played out; been a controlling voice already in his shipping firm; drunk five other of the best men in London under the table; broken his neck steeplechasing; shot a burglar in the legs; been nearly drowned, for a bet; killed snipe in Chelsea; been to Court for his sins; stared a ghost out of countenance; and travelled with a lady of Spain. If this young pup had done the last, it would be all he had; and yet, no doubt, he would call himself a "spark."

The conductor touched his arm.

"'Ere you are, sir."

"Thank you."

He lowered himself to the ground, and moved in the bluish darkness towards the gate of his daughter's house. Bob Pillin walked beside him, thinking: 'Poor old josser, he *is* gettin' a back number!' And he said: "I should have thought you ought to drive, sir. My old guv'nor would knock up at once if he went about at night like this."

The answer rumbled out into the misty air:

"Your father's got no chest; never had."

Bob Pillin gave vent to one of those fat cackles which come so readily from a certain type of man; and old Heythorp thought: 'Laughing at his father! Parrot!'

They had reached the porch.

A woman with dark hair and a thin, straight face and figure was arranging some flowers in the hall. She turned and said:

"You really ought not to be so late, Father! It's wicked at this time of year. Who is it—oh! Mr. Pillin, how do you do? Have you had tea? Won't you come to the drawing-room; or do you want to see my father?"

"Tha—anks! I believe your father——" And he thought: 'By Jove! the old chap *is* a caution!' For old Heythorp was crossing the hall without having paid the faintest attention to his daughter. Murmuring again:

"Tha—anks awfully; he wants to give me something," he followed. Miss Heythorp was not his style at all; he had a kind of dread of that thin woman who looked as if she could never be unbuttoned. They said she was a great churchgoer and all that sort of thing.

In his sanctum old Heythorp had moved to his writing-table, and was evidently anxious to sit down.

"Shall I give you a hand, sir?"

Receiving a shake of the head, Bob Pillin stood by the fire and watched. The old "sport" liked to paddle his own canoe. Fancy having to lower yourself into a chair like that! When an old

Johnny got to such a state it was really a mercy when he snuffed out, and made way for younger men. How his Companies could go on putting up with such a fossil for chairman was a marvel! The fossil rumbled and said in that almost inaudible voice:

"I suppose you're beginning to look forward to your father's shoes?"

Bob Pillin's mouth opened. The voice went on:

"Dibs and no responsibility. Tell him from me to drink port—add five years to his life."

To this unwarranted attack Bob Pillin made no answer save a laugh; he perceived that a manservant had entered the room.

"A Mrs. Larne, sir. Will you see her?"

At this announcement the old man seemed to try and start; then he nodded, and held out the note he had written. Bob Pillin received it together with the impression of a murmur which sounded like: "Scratch a poll, Poll!" and passing the fine figure of a woman in a fur coat, who seemed to warm the air as she went by, he was in the hall again before he perceived that he had left his hat.

A young and pretty girl was standing on the bearskin before the fire, looking at him with round-eyed innocence. He thought: 'This is bet-

ter; I mustn't disturb them for my hat'; and approaching the fire, said:

"Jolly cold, isn't it?"

The girl smiled: "Yes—jolly."

He noticed that she had a large bunch of violets at her breast, a lot of fair hair, a short straight nose, and round blue-grey eyes very frank and open. "Er——" he said, "I've left my hat in there."

"What larks!" And at her little clear laugh something moved within Bob Pillin.

"You know this house well?"

She shook her head. "But it's rather scrummy, isn't it?"

Bob Pillin, who had never yet thought so answered:

"Quite O.K."

The girl threw up her head to laugh again. "O.K.? What's that?"

Bob Pillin saw her white round throat, and thought: 'She *is* a ripper!' And he said with a certain desperation:

"My name's Pillin. Yours is Larne, isn't it? Are you a relation here?"

"He's our Guardy. Isn't he a chook?"

That rumbling whisper like "Scratch a poll, Poll!" recurring to Bob Pillin, he said with reservation:

"You know him better than I do."

"Oh! Aren't you his grandson, or something?"

Bob Pillin did not cross himself.

"Lord! No! My dad's an old friend of his; that's all."

"Is your dad like him?"

"Not much."

"What a pity! It would have been lovely if they'd been Tweedles."

Bob Pillin thought: 'This bit is something new. I wonder what her Christian name is.' And he said:

"What did your godfather and godmothers in your baptism——?"

The girl laughed; she seemed to laugh at everything.

"Phyllis."

Could he say: "Is my only joy"? Better keep it! But—for what? He wouldn't see her again if he didn't look out! And he said:

"I live at the last house in the park—the red one. D'you know it? Where do you?"

"Oh! a long way—23, Millicent Villas. It's a poky little house. I hate it. We have awful larks, though."

"Who are we?"

"Mother, and myself, and Jock—he's an awful boy. You can't conceive what an awful boy he is.

He's got nearly red hair; I think he'll be just like Guardy when he gets old. He's *awful!*"

Bob Pillin murmured:

"I should like to see him."

"Would you? I'll ask mother if you can. You won't want to again; he goes off all the time like a squib." She threw back her head, and again Bob Pillin felt a little giddy. He collected himself, and drawled:

"Are you going in to see your Guardy?"

"No. Mother's got something special to say. We've never been here before, you see. Isn't he fun, though?"

"Fun!"

"I think he's the greatest lark; but he's awfully nice to me. Jock calls him the last of the Stoic-'uns."

A voice called from old Heythorp's den:

"Phyllis!" It had a particular ring, that voice, as if coming from beautifully formed red lips, of which the lower one must curve the least bit over; it had, too, a caressing vitality, and a kind of warm falsity.

The girl threw a laughing look back over her shoulder, and vanished through the door into the room.

Bob Pillin remained with his back to the fire and his puppy round eyes fixed on the air that her

figure had last occupied. He was experiencing a sensation never felt before. Those travels with a lady of Spain, charitably conceded him by old Heythorp, had so far satisfied the emotional side of this young man; they had stopped short at Brighton and Scarborough, and been preserved from even the slightest intrusion of love. A calculated and hygienic career had caused no anxiety either to himself or his father; and this sudden swoop of something more than admiration gave him an uncomfortable choky feeling just above his high round collar, and in the temples a sort of buzzing—those first symptoms of chivalry. A man of the world does not, however, succumb without a struggle; and if his hat had not been out of reach, who knows whether he would not have left the house hurriedly, saying to himself: "No, no, my boy; Millicent Villas is hardly your form, when your intentions are honourable"? For somehow that round and laughing face, bob of glistening hair, those wide-opened grey eyes refused to awaken the beginnings of other intentions—such is the effect of youth and innocence on even the steadiest young men. With a kind of moral stammer, he was thinking: 'Can I—dare I offer to see them to their tram? Couldn't I even nip out and get the car round and send them home in it? No, I might miss them—better

stick it out here! What a jolly laugh! What a tipping face—strawberries and cream, hay, and all that! Millicent Villas!' And he wrote it on his cuff.

The door was opening; he heard that warm vibrating voice: "Come along, Phyllis!"—the girl's laugh so high and fresh: "Right-o! Coming!" And with, perhaps, the first real tremor he had ever known, he crossed to the front door. All the more chivalrous to escort them to the tram without a hat! And suddenly he heard: "I've got your hat, young man!" And her mother's voice, warm, and simulating shock: "Phyllis, you awful gairl! Did you ever see such an awful gairl, Mr. ——"

"Pillin, Mother."

And then—he did not quite know how—insulated from the January air by laughter and the scent of fur and violets, he was between them walking to their tram. It was like an experience out of the "Arabian Nights," or something of that sort, an intoxication which made one say one was going their way, though one would have to come all the way back in the same beastly tram. Nothing so warming had ever happened to him as sitting between them on that drive, so that he forgot the note in his pocket, and his desire to relieve the anxiety of the "old man," his father.

At the tram's terminus they all got out. There issued a purr of invitation to come and see them some time; a clear: "Jock'll love to see you!" A low laugh: "You awful gairl!" And a flash of cunning zigzagged across his brain. Taking off his hat, he said:

"Thanks awfully; rather!" and put his foot back on the step of the tram. Thus did he delicately expose the depths of his chivalry!

"Oh! you *said* you were going our way! What one-ers you do tell! Oh!" The words were as music; the sight of those eyes growing rounder, the most perfect he had ever seen; and Mrs. Larne's low laugh, so warm yet so preoccupied, and the tips of the girl's fingers waving back above her head. He heaved a sigh, and knew no more till he was seated at his club before a bottle of champagne. Home! Not he! He wished to drink and dream. "The old man" would get his news all right to-morrow!

3 §

The words: "A Mrs. Larne to see you, sir," had been of a nature to astonish weaker nerves. What had brought her here? She knew she mustn't come! Old Heythorp had watched her entrance with cynical amusement. The way she

whiffed herself at that young pup in passing, the way her eyes slid round! He had a very just appreciation of his son's widow; and a smile settled deep between his chin tuft and his moustache. She lifted his hand, kissed it, pressed it to her splendid bust, and said:

"So here I am at last, you see. Aren't you surprised?"

Old Heythorp shook his head.

"I really had to come and see you, Guardy; we haven't had a sight of you for such an age. And in this awful weather! How are you, dear old Guardy?"

"Never better." And, watching her green-grey eyes, he added: "Haven't a penny for you!"

Her face did not fall; she gave her feather-laugh.

"How dreadful of you to think I came for that! But I *am* in an awful fix, Guardy."

"Never knew you not to be."

"Just let me tell you, dear; it'll be some relief. I'm having the most terrible time."

She sank into a low chair, disengaging an overpowering scent of violets, while melancholy struggled to subdue her face and body.

"The most awful fix. I expect to be sold up any moment. We may be on the streets to-morrow. I daren't tell the children; they're so happy, poor

darlings. I shall be obliged to take Jock away from school. And Phyllis will have to stop her piano and dancing; it's an absolute crisis. And all due to those Midland Syndicate people. I've been counting on at least two hundred for my new story, and the wretches have refused it."

With a tiny handkerchief she removed one tear from the corner of one eye. "It *is* hard, Guardy; I worked my brain silly over that story."

From old Heythorp came a mutter which sounded suspiciously like: "Rats!"

Heaving a sigh, which conveyed nothing but the generosity of her breathing apparatus, Mrs. Larne went on:

"You couldn't, I suppose, let me have just one hundred?"

"Not a bob."

She sighed again, her eyes slid round the room; then in her warm voice she murmured:

"Guardy, you *were* my dear Philip's father, weren't you? I've never said anything; but *of course* you were. He was so like you, and so is Jock."

Nothing moved in old Heythorp's face. No pagan image consulted with flowers and song and sacrifice could have returned less answer. Her dear Philip! She had led him the devil of a life, or he was a Dutchman! And what the deuce

made her suddenly trot out the skeleton like this? But Mrs. Larne's eyes were still wandering.

"What a lovely house! You know, I think you ought to help me, Guardy. Just imagine if your grandchildren were thrown out into the street!"

The old man grinned. He was not going to deny his relationship—it was her look-out, not his. But neither was he going to let her rush him.

"And they will be; you *couldn't* look on and see it. Do come to my rescue this once. You really might do something for them."

With a rumbling sigh he answered:

"Wait. Can't give you a penny now. Poor as a church mouse."

"Oh! Guardy!"

"Fact."

Mrs. Larne heaved one of her most buoyant sighs. She certainly did not believe him.

"Well!" she said; "you'll be sorry when we come round one night and sing for pennies under your window. Wouldn't you like to see Phyllis? I left her in the hall. She's growing such a sweet gairl. Guardy—just fifty!"

"Not a rap."

Mrs. Larne threw up her hands. "Well! You'll repent it. I'm at my last gasp." She sighed profoundly, and the perfume of violets escaped in a

cloud. Then, getting up, she went to the door and called: "Phyllis!"

When the girl entered old Heythorp felt the nearest approach to a flutter of the heart for many years. She had put her hair up! She was like a spring day in January; such a relief from that scented humbug, her mother. Pleasant the touch of her lips on his forehead, the sound of her clear voice, the sight of her slim movements, the feeling that she did him credit—clean-run stock, she and that young scamp Jock—better than the holy woman, his daughter Adela, would produce if anyone were ever fool enough to marry her, or that pragmatical fellow, his son Ernest.

And when they were gone he reflected with added zest on the six thousand pounds he was getting for them out of Joe Pillin and his ships. He would have to pitch it strong in his speech at the general meeting. With freights so low, there was bound to be opposition. No dash nowadays; nothing but flabby caution! They were a scrimshanking lot on the Board—he had had to pull them round one by one—the deuce of a tug getting this thing through! And yet, the business was sound enough. Those ships would earn money, properly handled—good money!

His valet, coming in to prepare him for dinner, found him asleep. He had for the old man as

much admiration as may be felt for one who cannot put his own trousers on. He would say to the housemaid Molly: "He's a game old blighter—must have been a rare one in his day. Cocks his hat at you, even now, I see!" To which the girl, Irish and pretty, would reply: "Well, an' sure I don't mind, if it gives um a pleasure. 'Tis better annyway than the sad eye I get from herself."

At dinner, old Heythorp always sat at one end of the rosewood table and his daughter at the other. It was the eminent moment of the day. With napkin tucked high into his waistcoat, he gave himself to the meal with passion. His palate was undimmed, his digestion unimpaired. He could still eat as much as two men, and drink more than one. And while he savoured each mouthful he never spoke if he could help it. The holy woman had nothing to say that he cared to hear, and he nothing to say that she cared to listen to. She had a horror, too, of what she called "the pleasures of the table"—those lusts of the flesh! She was always longing to dock his grub, he knew. Would see her further first! What other pleasures were there at his age? Let her wait till *she* was eighty. But she never would be; too thin and holy!

This evening, however, with the advent of the partridge she *did* speak.

"Who were your visitors, Father?"

Trust her for nosing anything out! Fixing his little blue eyes on her, he mumbled with a very full mouth: "Ladies."

"So I saw; what ladies?"

He had a longing to say: 'Part of one of my families under the rose.' As a fact it was the best part of the only one, but the temptation to multiply exceedingly was almost overpowering. He checked himself, however, and went on eating partridge, his secret irritation crimsoning his cheeks; and he watched her eyes, those cold precise and round grey eyes, noting it, and knew she was thinking: 'He eats too much.'

She said: "Sorry I'm not considered fit to be told. You ought not to be drinking hock."

Old Heythorp took up the long green glass, drained it, and repressing fumes and emotion went on with his partridge. His daughter pursed her lips, took a sip of water, and said:

"I know their name is Larne, but it conveyed nothing to me; perhaps it's just as well."

The old man, mastering a spasm, said with a grin:

"My daughter-in-law and my granddaughter."

"What! Ernest married—Oh! nonsense!"

He chuckled, and shook his head.

"Then do you mean to say, Father, that you

were married before you married my mother?"

"No."

The expression on her face was as good as a play!

She said with a sort of disgust: "Not married! I see. I suppose those people are hanging round your neck, then; no wonder you're always in difficulties. Are there any more of them?"

Again the old man suppressed that spasm, and the veins in his neck and forehead swelled alarmingly. If he had spoken he would infallibly have choked. He ceased eating, and putting his hands on the table tried to raise himself. He could not and subsiding in his chair sat glaring at the stiff, quiet figure of his daughter.

"Don't be silly, Father, and make a scene before Meller. Finish your dinner."

He did not answer. He was not going to sit there to be dragooned and insulted! His helplessness had never so weighed on him before. It was like a revelation. A log—that had to put up with anything! A log! And, waiting for his valet to return, he cunningly took up his fork.

In that saintly voice of hers she said:

"I suppose you don't realise that it's a shock to me. I don't know what Ernest will think——"

"Ernest be d——d."

"I do wish, Father, you wouldn't swear."

Old Heythorp's rage found vent in a sort of rumble. How the devil had he gone on all these years in the same house with that woman, dining with her day after day! But the servant had come back now, and putting down his fork he said:

"Help me up!"

The man paused, thunderstruck, with the *soufflé* balanced. To leave dinner unfinished—it was a portent!

"Help me up!"

"Mr. Heythorp's not very well, Meller; take his other arm."

The old man shook off her hand.

"I'm very well. Help me up. Dine in my own room in future."

Raised to his feet, he walked slowly out; but in his sanctum he did not sit down, obsessed by this first overwhelming realisation of his helplessness. He stood swaying a little, holding on to the table, till the servant, having finished serving dinner, brought in his port.

"Are you waiting to sit down, sir?"

He shook his head. Hang it, he could do that for himself, anyway. He must think of something to fortify his position against that woman. And he said:

"Send me Molly!"

"Yes, sir." The man put down the port and went.

Old Heythorp filled his glass, drank, and filled again. He took a cigar from the box and lighted it. The girl came in, a grey-eyed, dark-haired damsel, and stood with her hands folded, her head a little to one side, her lips a little parted. The old man said:

"You're a human being."

"I would hope so, sirr."

"I'm going to ask you something as a human being—not a servant—see?"

"No, sirr; but I will be glad to do annything you like."

"Then put your nose in here every now and then, to see if I want anything. Meller goes out sometimes. Don't say anything; just put your nose in."

"Oh! an' I will; 'tis a pleasure 'twill be to do ut."

He nodded, and when she had gone lowered himself into his chair with a sense of appeasement. Pretty girl! Comfort to see a pretty face—not a pale, peeky thing like Adela's. His anger burned up anew. So she counted on his helplessness, had begun to count on that, had she? She should see that there was life in the old dog yet! And his sacrifice of the uneaten *soufflé*, the still less eaten

mushrooms, the peppermint sweet with which he usually concluded dinner, seemed to consecrate that purpose. They all thought he was a hulk, without a shot left in the locker! He had seen a couple of them at the Board that afternoon shrugging at each other, as though saying: 'Look at him!' And young Farney pitying him. Pity, forsooth! And that coarse-grained solicitor chap at the creditors' meeting curling his lip as much as to say: 'One foot in the grave!' He had seen the clerks dowsing the glim of their grins; and that young pup Bob Pillin screwing up his supercilious mug over his dog-collar. He knew that scented humbug Rosamund was getting scared that he'd drop off before she'd squeezed him dry. And his valet was always looking him up and down queerly. As to that holy woman——! Not quite so fast! Not quite so fast! And filling his glass for the fourth time, he slowly sucked down the dark red fluid, with the "old boots" flavour which his soul loved, and, drawing deep at his cigar, closed his eyes.

II

1 §

The room in the hotel where the general meetings of "The Island Navigation Company" were held was nearly full when the secretary came through the door which as yet divided the shareholders from their directors. Having surveyed their empty chairs, their ink and papers, and nodded to a shareholder or two, he stood, watch in hand, contemplating the congregation. A thicker attendance than he had ever seen! Due, no doubt, to the lower dividend, and this Pillin business. And his tongue curled. For if he had a natural contempt for his Board, with the exception of the chairman, he had a still more natural contempt for his shareholders. Amusing spectacle when you came to think of it, a general meeting! Unique! Eighty or a hundred men, and five women, assembled through sheer devotion to their money. Was any other function in the world so single-hearted. Church was nothing to it—so many motives were mingled there with devotion to one's soul. A well-educated young man—reader of Anatole France, and other writers—he enjoyed ironic speculation. What earthly good did they think they got by coming here? Half-

past two! He put his watch back into his pocket, and passed into the Board-room.

There, the fumes of lunch and of a short preliminary meeting made cosy the February atmosphere. By the fire four directors were conversing rather restlessly; the fifth was combing his beard; the chairman sat with eyes closed and red lips moving rhythmically in the sucking of a lozenge, the slips of his speech ready in his hand. The secretary said in his cheerful voice: "Time, sir."

Old Heythorp swallowed, lifted his arms, rose with help, and walked through to his place at the centre of the table. The five directors followed. And, standing at the chairman's right, the secretary read the minutes, forming the words precisely with his curling tongue. Then, assisting the chairman to his feet, he watched those rows of faces, and thought: 'Mistake to let them see he can't get up without help. He ought to have let me read his speech—I wrote it.'

The chairman began to speak:

"It is my duty and my pleasure, ladies and gentlemen, for the nineteenth consecutive year to present to you the directors' report and the accounts for the past twelve months. You will all have had special notice of a measure of policy on which your Board has decided, and to which you

will be asked to-day to give your adherence—to that I shall come at the end of my remarks . . ."

"Excuse me, sir; we can't hear a word down here."

'Ah!' thought the secretary, 'I was expecting that.'

The chairman went on, undisturbed. But several shareholders now rose, and the same speaker said testily: "We might as well go home. If the chairman's got no voice, can't somebody read for him?"

The chairman took a sip of water, and resumed. Almost all in the last six rows were now on their feet, and amid a hubbub of murmurs the chairman held out to the secretary the slips of his speech, and fell heavily back into his chair.

The secretary re-read from the beginning; and as each sentence fell from his tongue, he thought: 'How good that is!' 'That's very clear!' 'A neat touch!' 'This is getting them.' It seemed to him a pity they could not know it was all his composition. When at last he came to the Pillin sale he paused for a second.

"I come now to the measure of policy to which I made allusion at the beginning of my speech. Your Board has decided to expand your enterprise by purchasing the entire fleet of Pillin & Co., Ltd. By this transaction we become the own-

ers of the four steamships *Smyrna, Damascus, Tyre,* and *Sidon,* vessels in prime condition with a total freight-carrying capacity of fifteen thousand tons, at the low inclusive price of sixty thousand pounds. Gentlemen, '*Vestigia nulla retrorsum!*'"—it was the chairman's phrase, his bit of the speech, and the secretary did it more than justice. "Times are bad, but your Board is emphatically of the opinion that they are touching bottom; and this, in their view, is the psychological moment for a forward stroke. They confidently recommend your adoption of their policy and the ratification of this purchase, which they believe will, in the not far distant future, substantially increase the profits of the Company." The secretary sat down with reluctance. The speech should have continued with a number of appealing sentences which he had carefully prepared, but the chairman had cut them out with the simple comment: "They ought to be glad of the chance." It was, in his view, an error.

The director who had combed his beard now rose—a man of presence, who might be trusted to say nothing long and suavely. While he was speaking the secretary was busy noting whence opposition was likely to come. The majority were sitting owl-like—a good sign; but some dozen were studying their copies of the report, and

three at least were making notes—Westgate, for instance, who wanted to get on the Board, and was sure to make himself unpleasant—the time-honoured method of vinegar; and Batterson, who also desired to come on, and might be trusted to support the Board—the time-honoured method of oil; while, if one knew anything of human nature, the fellow who had complained that he might as well go home would have something uncomfortable to say. The director finished his remarks, combed his beard with his fingers, and sat down.

A momentary pause ensued. Then Messieurs Westgate and Batterson rose together. Seeing the chairman nod towards the latter, the secretary thought: 'Mistake! He should have humoured Westgate by giving him precedence.' But that was the worst of the old man, he had no notion of the *suaviter in modo!* Mr. Batterson—thus unchained—would like, if he might be so allowed, to congratulate the Board on having piloted their ship so smoothly through the troublous waters of the past year. With their worthy chairman still at the helm, he had no doubt that in spite of the still low—he would not say falling—barometer, and the—er—unseasonable climacteric, they might rely on weathering the—er—he would not say storm. He would confess that the present

dividend of four per cent. was not one which satisfied every aspiration (Hear, hear!), but speaking for himself, and he hoped for others—and here Mr. Batterson looked round—he recognised that in all the circumstances it was as much as they had the right—er—to expect. But following the bold but to *his* mind prudent development which the Board proposed to make, he thought that they might reasonably, if not sanguinely, anticipate a more golden future. ("No, no!") A shareholder said, 'No, no!' That might seem to indicate a certain lack of confidence in the special proposal before the meeting. ("Yes!") From that lack of confidence he would like at once to dissociate himself. Their chairman, a man of foresight and acumen, and valour proved on many a field and—er—sea, would not have committed himself to this policy without good reason. In his opinion they were in safe hands, and he was glad to register his support of the measure proposed. The chairman had well said in his speech: "*Vestigia nulla retrorsum!*" Shareholders would agree with him that there could be no better motto for Englishmen. Ahem!

Mr. Batterson sat down. And Mr. Westgate rose: He wanted—he said—to know more, much more, about this proposition, which to his mind

was of a very dubious wisdom . . . 'Ah!' thought the secretary, 'I told the old boy he must tell them more' . . . To whom, for instance, had the proposal first been made? To him!—the chairman said. Good! But why were Pillins selling, if freights were to go up, as they were told?

"Matter of opinion."

"Quite so; and in my opinion they are going lower, and Pillins were right to sell. It follows that we are wrong to buy." ("Hear, hear!" "No, no!") "Pillins are shrewd people. What does the chairman say? Nerves! Does he mean to tell us that this sale was the result of nerves?"

The chairman nodded.

"That appears to me a somewhat fantastic theory; but I will leave that and confine myself to asking the grounds on which the chairman bases his confidence; in fact, what it is which is actuating the Board in pressing on us at such a time what I have no hesitation in stigmatising as a rash proposal. In a word, I want light as well as leading in this matter."

Mr. Westgate sat down.

What would the chairman do now? The situation was distinctly awkward—seeing his helplessness and the lukewarmness of the Board behind him. And the secretary felt more strongly than

ever the absurdity of his being an underling, he who in a few well-chosen words could so easily have twisted the meeting round his thumb. Suddenly he heard the long, rumbling sigh which preluded the chairman's speeches.

"Has any other gentleman anything to say before I move the adoption of the report?"

Phew! That would put their backs up. Yes, sure enough it had brought that fellow, who had said he might as well go home, to his feet! Now for something nasty!

"Mr. Westgate requires answering. I don't like this business. I don't impute anything to anybody; but it looks to me as if there were something behind it which the shareholders ought to be told. Not only that; but, to speak frankly, I'm not satisfied to be ridden over roughshod in this fashion by one who, whatever he may have been in the past, is obviously not now in the prime of his faculties."

With a gasp the secretary thought: 'I knew that was a plain-spoken man!'

He heard again the rumbling beside him. The chairman had gone crimson, his mouth was pursed, his little eyes were very blue.

"Help me up," he said.

The secretary helped him, and waited, rather breathless.

The chairman took a sip of water, and his voice, unexpectedly loud, broke an ominous hush:

"Never been so insulted in my life. My best services have been at your disposal for nineteen years; you know what measure of success this Company has attained. I am the oldest man here, and my experience of shipping is, I hope, a little greater than that of the two gentlemen who spoke last. I have done my best for you, ladies and gentlemen, and we shall see whether you are going to endorse an indictment of my judgment and of my honour, if I am to take the last speaker seriously. This purchase is for your good. 'There is a tide in the affairs of men'—and I for one am not content, never have been, to stagnate. If that is what you want, however, by all means give your support to these gentlemen and have done with it. I tell you freights will go up before the end of the year; the purchase is a sound one, more than a sound one—I, at any rate, stand or fall by it. Refuse to ratify it, if you like; if you do, I shall resign."

He sank back into his seat. The secretary, stealing a glance, thought with a sort of enthusiasm: 'Bravo! Who'd have thought he could rally his voice like that? A good touch, too, that about his honour! I believe he's knocked them.

It's still dicky, though, if that fellow at the back gets up again; the old chap can't work that stop a second time.' Ah! here was 'old Apple-pie' on his hind legs. That was all right!

"I do not hesitate to say that I am an old friend of the chairman; we are, many of us, old friends of the chairman, and it has been painful to me, and I doubt not to others, to hear an attack made on him. If he is old in body, he is young in mental vigour and courage. I wish we were all as young. We ought to stand by him; I say, we ought to stand by him." ("Hear, hear! Hear, hear!") And the secretary thought: 'That's done it!' And he felt a sudden odd emotion, watching the chairman bobbing his body, like a wooden toy, at old Appleby; and old Appleby bobbing back. Then, seeing a shareholder close to the door get up, thought: 'Who's that? I know his face—Ah! yes; Ventnor, the solicitor—he's one of the chairman's creditors that are coming again this afternoon. What now?'

"I can't agree that we ought to let sentiment interfere with our judgment in this matter. The question is simply: How are our pockets going to be affected? I came here with some misgivings, but the attitude of the chairman has been such as to remove them; and I shall support the proposition." The secretary thought: 'That's all

right—only, he said it rather queerly—rather queerly.'

Then, after a long silence, the chairman, without rising, said:

"I move the adoption of the report and accounts."

"I second that."

"Those in favour signify the same in the usual way. Contrary? Carried." The secretary noted the dissentients, six in number, and that Mr. Westgate did not vote.

A quarter of an hour later he stood in the body of the emptying room supplying names to one of the gentlemen of the Press. The passionless fellow said: "Haythorp, with an 'a'; oh! an 'e'; he seems an old man. Thank you. I may have the slips? Would you like to see a proof? With an 'a' you said—oh! an 'e.' Good afternoon!" And the secretary thought: 'Those fellows, what *does* go on inside them? Fancy not knowing the old chairman by now!' . . .

2 §

Back in the proper office of "The Island Navigation Company" old Heythorp sat smoking a cigar and smiling like a purring cat. He was dreaming a little of his triumph, sifting with his old brain, still subtle, the wheat from the chaff of

the demurrers: Westgate—nothing in that—professional discontent till they silenced him with a place on the board—but not while *he* held the reins! That chap at the back—an ill-conditioned fellow! "Something behind!" Suspicious brute! There *was* something—but—hang it! they might think themselves lucky to get four ships at that price, and all due to him! It was on the last speaker that his mind dwelt with a doubt. That fellow Ventnor, to whom he owed money—there had been something just a little queer about his tone—as much as to say, "I smell a rat." Well! one would see that at the creditors' meeting in half an hour.

"Mr. Pillin, sir."

"Show him in!"

In a fur coat which seemed to extinguish his thin form, Joe Pillin entered. It was snowing, and the cold had nipped and yellowed his meagre face between its slight grey whiskering. He said thinly:

"How are you, Sylvanus? Aren't you perished in this cold?"

"Warm as a toast. Sit down. Take off your coat."

"Oh! I should be lost without it. You must have a fire inside you. So—so it's gone through?"

Old Heythorp nodded; and Joe Pillin, wander-

ing like a spirit, scrutinised the shut door. He came back to the table, and said in a low voice:

"It's a great sacrifice."

Old Heythorp smiled.

"Have you signed the deed poll?"

Producing a parchment from his pocket Joe Pillin unfolded it with caution to disclose his signature, and said:

"I don't like it—it's irrevocable."

A chuckle escaped old Heythorp.

"As death."

Joe Pillin's voice passed up into the treble clef.

"I can't bear irrevocable things. I consider you stampeded me, playing on my nerves."

Examining the signatures old Heythorp murmured

"Tell your lawyer to lock it up. He must think you a sad dog, Joe."

"Ah! Suppose on my death it comes to the knowledge of my wife!"

"She won't be able to make it hotter for you than you'll be already."

Joe Pillin replaced the deed within his coat, emitting a queer thin noise. He simply could not bear joking on such subjects.

"Well," he said, "you've got your way; you always do. Who is this Mrs. Larne? You oughtn't to keep me in the dark. It seems my boy met

her at your house. You told me she didn't come there."

Old Heythorp said with relish:

"Her husband was my son by a woman I was fond of before I married; her children are my grandchildren. You've provided for them. Best thing you ever did."

"I don't know—I don't know. I'm sorry you told me. It makes it all the more doubtful. As soon as the transfer's complete, I shall get away abroad. This cold's killing me. I wish you'd give me your recipe for keeping warm."

"Get a new inside."

Joe Pillin regarded his old friend with a sort of yearning. "And yet," he said, "I suppose, with your full-blooded habit, your life hangs by a thread, doesn't it?"

"A stout one, my boy!"

"Well, good-bye, Sylvanus. You're a Job's comforter; I must be getting home." He put on his hat, and, lost in his fur coat, passed out into the corridor. On the stairs he met a man who said:

"How do you do, Mr. Pillin? I know your son. Been seeing the chairman? I see your sale's gone through all right. I hope that'll do us some good, but I suppose you think the other way?"

Peering at him from under his hat, Joe Pillin said:

"Mr. Ventnor, I think? Thank you! It's very cold, isn't it?" And, with that cautious remark, he passed on down.

Alone again, old Heythorp thought: 'By George! What a wavering, quavering, thread-paper of a fellow! What misery life must be to a chap like that! He walks in fear—he wallows in it. Poor devil!' And a curious feeling swelled his heart, of elation, of lightness such as he had not known for years. Those two young things were safe now from penury—safe! After dealing with those infernal creditors of his he would go round and have a look at the children. With a hundred and twenty a year the boy could go into the Army—best place for a young scamp like that. The girl would go off like hot cakes, of course, but she needn't take the first calf that came along. As for their mother, she must look after herself; nothing under two thousand a year would keep *her* out of debt. But trust her for wheedling and bluffing her way out of any scrape! Watching his cigar-smoke curl and disperse he was conscious of the strain he had been under these last six weeks, aware suddenly of how greatly he had baulked at thought of to-day's general meeting. Yes! It might have turned out nasty. He knew well enough the forces on the Board, and off, who would be only too glad to shelve him. If he were

shelved here his other two Companies would be sure to follow suit, and bang would go every penny of his income—he would be a pauper dependant on that holy woman. Well! Safe now for another year if he could stave off these sharks once more. It might be a harder job this time, but he was in luck—in luck, and it must hold. And taking a luxurious pull at his cigar, he rang the handbell.

"Bring 'em in here, Mr. Farney. And let me have a cup of China tea as strong as you can make it."

"Yes, sir. Will you see the proof of the press report, or will you leave it to me?"

"To you."

"Yes, sir. It was a good meeting, wasn't it?"

Old Heythorp nodded.

"Wonderful how your voice came back just at the right moment. I was afraid things were going to be difficult. The insult did it, I think. It was a monstrous thing to say. I could have punched his head."

Again old Heythorp nodded; and, looking into the secretary's fine blue eyes, he repeated: "Bring 'em in."

The lonely minute before the entrance of his creditors passed in the thought: 'So that's how

it struck him! Short shrift I should get if it came out.'

The gentlemen, who numbered ten this time, bowed to their debtor, evidently wondering why the deuce they troubled to be polite to an old man who kept them out of their money. Then, the secretary reappearing with a cup of China tea, they watched while their debtor drank it. The feat was tremulous. Would he get through without spilling it all down his front, or choking? To those unaccustomed to his private life it was slightly miraculous. He put the cup down empty, tremblingly removed some yellow drops from the little white tuft below his lip, relit his cigar, and said:

"No use beating about the bush, gentlemen; I can offer you fourteen hundred a year so long as I live and hold my directorships, and not a penny more. If you can't accept that, you must make me bankrupt and get about sixpence in the pound. My qualifying shares will fetch a couple of thousand at market price. I own nothing else. The house I live in, and everything in it, barring my clothes, my wine, and my cigars, belong to my daughter under a settlement fifteen years old. My solicitors and bankers will give you every information. That's the position in a nutshell."

In spite of business habits the surprise of the

ten gentlemen was only partially concealed. A man who owed them so much would naturally say he owned nothing, but would he refer them to his solicitors and bankers unless he were telling the truth? Then Mr. Ventnor said:

"Will you submit your pass books?"

"No, but I'll authorise my bankers to give you a full statement of my receipts for the last five years—longer, if you like."

The strategic stroke of placing the ten gentlemen round the Board table had made it impossible for them to consult freely without being overheard, but the low-voiced transference of thought travelling round was summed up at last by Mr. Brownbee.

"We think, Mr. Heythorp, that your fees and dividends should enable you to set aside for us a larger sum. Sixteen hundred, in fact, is what we think you should give us yearly. Representing, as we do, sixteen thousand pounds, the prospect is not cheering, but we hope you have some good years before you yet. We understand your income to be two thousand pounds."

Old Heythorp shook his head. "Nineteen hundred and thirty pounds in a good year. Must eat and drink; must have a man to look after me—not as active as I was. Can't do on less than five hundred pounds. Fourteen hundred's all I can

give you, gentlemen; it's an advance of two hundred pounds. That's my last word."

The silence was broken by Mr. Ventnor.

"And it's my last word that I'm not satisfied. If these other gentlemen accept your proposition I shall be forced to consider what I can do on my own account."

The old man stared at him, and answered:

"Oh! you will, sir; we shall see."

The others had risen and were gathered in a knot at the end of the table; old Heythorp and Mr. Ventnor alone remained seated. The old man's lower lip projected till the white hairs below stood out like bristles. 'You ugly dog,' he was thinking, 'you think you've got something up your sleeve. Well, do your worst!' The "ugly dog" rose abruptly and joined the others. And old Heythorp closed his eyes, sitting perfectly still, with his cigar, which had gone out, sticking up between his teeth. Mr. Brownbee turning to voice the decision come to, cleared his throat.

"Mr. Heythorp," he said, "if your bankers and solicitors bear out your statements, we shall accept your offer *faute de mieux*, in consideration of your——" but meeting the old man's eyes, which said so very plainly: "Blow your consideration!" he ended with a stammer: "Perhaps

you will kindly furnish us with the authorisation you spoke of?"

Old Heythorp nodded, and Mr. Brownbee, with a little bow, clasped his hat to his breast and moved towards the door. The nine gentlemen followed. Mr. Ventnor, bringing up the rear, turned and looked back. But the old man's eyes were already closed again.

The moment his creditors were gone, old Heythorp sounded the hand-bell.

"Help me up, Mr. Farney. That Ventnor—what's his holding?"

"Quite small. Only ten shares, I think."

"Ah! What time is it?"

"Quarter to four, sir."

"Get me a taxi."

After visiting his bank and his solicitors he struggled once more into his cab and caused it to be driven towards Millicent Villas. A kind of sleepy triumph permeated his whole being, bumped and shaken by the cab's rapid progress. So! He was free of those sharks now so long as he could hold on to his Companies; and he would still have a hundred a year or more to spare for Rosamund and her youngsters. He could live on four hundred, or even three-fifty, without losing his independence, for there would be no standing life in that holy woman's house unless he could

pay his own scot! A good day's work! The best for many a long month!

The cab stopped before the villa.

§ 3 §

There are rooms which refuse to give away their owners, and rooms which seem to say: 'They really are like this.' Of such was Rosamund Larne's—a sort of permanent confession, seeming to remark to anyone who entered: 'Her taste? Well, you can see—cheerful and exuberant; her habits—yes, she sits here all the morning in a dressing-gown, smoking cigarettes and dropping ink; kindly observe my carpet. Notice the piano—it has a look of coming and going, according to the exchequer. This very deep-cushioned sofa is permanent, however; the water-colours on the walls are safe, too—they're by herself. Mark the scent of mimosa—she likes flowers, and likes them strong. No clock, of course. Examine the bureau—she is obviously always ringing for "the drumstick," and saying: "Where's this, Ellen, and where's that? You naughty gairl, you've been tidying." Cast an eye on that pile of manuscript—she has evidently a genius for composition; it flows off her pen—like Shakespeare, she never blots a line. See how she's had the electric light put in, instead of that horrid gas; but

try and turn either of them on—you can't; last quarter isn't paid, of course; and she uses an oil lamp, you can tell that by the ceiling. The dog over there, who will not answer to the name of "Carmen," a Pekinese spaniel like a little Djin, all prominent eyes rolling their blacks, and no nose between—yes, Carmen looks as if she didn't know what was coming next; she's right—it's a pet-and-slap-again life! Consider, too, the fittings of the tea-tray, rather soiled, though not quite tin, but I say unto you that no millionaire's in all its glory ever had a liqueur bottle on it.'

When old Heythorp entered this room, which extended from back to front of the little house, preceded by the announcement "Mr. Æsop," it was resonant with a very clatter-bodandigo of noises, from Phyllis playing the Machiche; from the boy Jock on the hearthrug, emitting at short intervals the most piercing notes from an ocarina; from Mrs. Larne on the sofa, talking with her trailing volubility to Bob Pillin; from Bob Pillin muttering: "Ye—es! Qui—ite! Ye—es!" and gazing at Phyllis over his collar. And, on the window-sill, as far as she could get from all this noise, the little dog Carmen was rolling her eyes. At sight of their visitor Jock blew one rending screech, and bolting behind the sofa, placed his

chin on its top, so that nothing but his round pink unmoving face was visible; and the dog Carmen tried to climb the blind cord.

Encircled from behind by the arms of Phyllis, and preceded by the gracious perfumed bulk of Mrs. Larne, old Heythorp was escorted to the sofa. It was low, and when he had plumped down on to it, the boy Jock emitted a hollow groan. Bob Pillin was the first to break the silence.

"How are you, sir? I hope it's gone through."

Old Heythorp nodded. His eyes were fixed on the liqueur, and Mrs. Larne murmured:

"Guardy, you *must* try our new liqueur. Jock, you awful boy, get up and bring Guardy a glass."

The boy Jock approached the tea-table, took up a glass, put it to his eye and filled it rapidly.

"You horrible boy, you could see that glass has been used."

In a high round voice rather like an angel's, Jock answered:

"All right, Mother; I'll get rid of it," and rapidly swallowing the yellow liquor, took up another glass.

Mrs. Larne laughed.

"What *am* I to do with him?"

A loud shriek prevented a response. Phyllis, who had taken her brother by the ear to lead him to the door, let him go to clasp her injured self.

Bob Pillin went hastening towards her; and following the young man with her chin, Mrs. Larne said, smiling:

"Aren't those children awful? He's such a nice fellow. We like him so much, Guardy."

The old man grinned. So she was making up to that young pup! Rosamund Larne, watching him, murmured:

"Oh! Guardy, you're as bad as Jock. He takes after you terribly. Look at the shape of his head. Jock, come here!" The innocent boy approached; with his girlish complexion, his flowery blue eyes, his perfect mouth, he stood before his mother like a large cherub. And suddenly he blew his ocarina in a dreadful manner. Mrs. Larne launched a box at his ears, and receiving the wind of it he fell prone.

"That's the way he behaves. Be off with you, you awful boy. I want to talk to Guardy."

The boy withdrew on his stomach, and sat against the wall cross-legged, fixing his innocent round eyes on old Heythorp. Mrs. Larne sighed.

"Things are worse and worse, Guardy. I'm at my wits' end to tide over this quarter. You wouldn't advance me a hundred on my new story? I'm sure to get two for it in the end."

The old man shook his head.

"I've done something for you and the chil-

dren," he said. "You'll get notice of it in a day or two; ask no questions."

"Oh! Guardy! Oh! you dear!" And her gaze rested on Bob Pillin, leaning over the piano, where Phyllis again sat.

Old Heythorp snorted. "What are you cultivating that young gaby for? She mustn't be grabbed up by any fool who comes along."

Mrs. Larne murmured at once:

"Of course, the dear gairl is *much* too young. Phyllis, come and talk to Guardy!"

When the girl was installed beside him on the sofa, and he had felt that little thrill of warmth the proximity of youth can bring, he said:

"Been a good girl?"

She shook her head.

"Can't, when Jock's not at school. Mother can't pay for him this term."

Hearing his name, the boy Jock blew his ocarina till Mrs. Larne drove him from the room, and Phyllis went on:

"He's more awful than anything you can think of. Was my dad at all like him, Guardy? Mother's always so mysterious about him. I suppose you knew him well."

Old Heythorp, incapable of confusion, answered stolidly:

"Not very."

"Who was *his* father? I don't believe even mother knows."

"Man about town in my day."

"Oh! your day must have been jolly. Did you wear peg-top trousers, and dundreary's?"

Old Heythorp nodded.

"What larks! And I suppose you had lots of adventures with opera dancers and gambling. The young men are all so good now." Her eyes rested on Bob Pillin. "That young man's a perfect stick of goodness."

Old Heythorp grunted.

"You wouldn't know how good he was," Phyllis went on musingly, "unless you'd sat next him in a tunnel. The other day he had his waist squeezed and he simply sat still and did nothing. And then when the tunnel ended, it was Jock after all, not me. His face was—Oh! ah! ha! ha! Ah! ha!" She threw back her head, displaying all her white, round throat. Then edging near, she whispered:

"He likes to pretend, of course, that he's fearfully lively. He's promised to take mother and me to the theatre and supper afterwards. Won't it be scrummy! Only, I haven't anything to go in."

Old Heythorp said: "What do you want? Irish poplin?"

Her mouth opened wide: "Oh! Guardy! Soft white satin!"

"How many yards 'll go round you?"

"I should think about twelve. We could make it ourselves. You *are* a chook!"

A scent of hair, like hay, enveloped him, her lips bobbed against his nose, and there came a feeling in his heart as when he rolled the first sip of a special wine against his palate. This little house was a rumty-too affair, her mother was a humbug, the boy a cheeky young rascal, but there was a warmth here he never felt in that big house which had been his wife's and was now his holy daughter's. And once more he rejoiced at his day's work, and the success of his breach of trust, which put some little ground beneath these young feet, in a hard and unscrupulous world. Phyllis whispered in his ear:

"Guardy, do look; he *will* stare at me like that. Isn't it awful—like a boiled rabbit?"

Bob Pillin, attentive to Mrs. Larne, was gazing with all his might over her shoulder at the girl. The young man was moonstruck, that was clear! There was something almost touching in the stare of those puppy dog's eyes. And he thought: 'Young beggar—wish I were his age!' The utter injustice of having an old and helpless body, when your desire for enjoyment was as great as

ever! They said a man was as old as he felt! Fools! A man was as old as his legs and arms, and not a day younger. He heard the girl beside him utter a discomfortable sound, and saw her face cloud as if tears were not far off; she jumped up, and going to the window, lifted the little dog and buried her face in its brown and white fur. Old Heythorp thought: 'She sees that her humbugging mother is using her as a decoy.' But she had come back, and the little dog, rolling its eyes horribly at the strange figure on the sofa, in a desperate effort to escape succeeded in reaching her shoulder, where it stayed perched like a cat, held by one paw and trying to back away into space. Old Heythorp said abruptly:

"Are you very fond of your mother?"

"Of course I am, Guardy. I adore her."

"H'm! Listen to me. When you come of age or marry, you'll have a hundred and twenty a year of your own that you can't get rid of. Don't ever be persuaded into doing what you don't want. And remember: Your mother's a sieve, no good giving her money; keep what you'll get for yourself—it's only a pittance, and you'll want it all —every penny."

Phyllis's eyes had opened very wide; so that he wondered if she had taken in his words.

"Oh! Isn't money horrible, Guardy?"

"The want of it."

"No, it's beastly altogether. If only we were like birds. Or if one could put out a plate overnight, and have just enough in the morning to use during the day."

Old Heythorp sighed.

"There's only one thing in life that matters—independence. Lose that, and you lose everything. That's the value of money. Help me up."

Phyllis stretched out her hands, and the little dog, running down her back, resumed its perch on the window-sill, close to the blind cord.

Once on his feet, old Heythorp said:

"Give me a kiss. You'll have your satin tomorrow."

Then looking at Bob Pillin, he remarked:

"Going my way? I'll give you a lift."

The young man, giving Phyllis one appealing look, answered dully: "Tha-anks!" and they went out together to the taxi. In that draughtless vehicle they sat, full of who knows what contempt of age for youth, and youth for age; the old man resenting this young pup's aspiration to his granddaughter; the young man annoyed that this old image had dragged him away before he wished to go. Old Heythorp said at last:

"Well?"

Thus expected to say something, Bob Pillin muttered:

"Glad your meetin' went off well, sir. You scored a triumph I should think."

"Why?"

"Oh! I don't know. I thought you had a good bit of opposition to contend with."

Old Heythorp looked at him.

"Your grandmother!" he said; then, with his habitual instinct of attack, added: "You make the most of your opportunities, I see."

At this rude assault Bob Pillin's red-cheeked face assumed a certain dignity. "I don't know what you mean, sir. Mrs. Larne is very kind to me."

"No doubt. But don't try to pick the flowers."

Thoroughly upset, Bob Pillin preserved a dogged silence. This fortnight, since he had first met Phyllis in old Heythorp's hall, had been the most singular of his existence up to now. He would never have believed that a fellow could be so quickly and completely bowled, could succumb without a kick, without even wanting to kick. To one with his philosophy of having a good time and never committing himself too far, it was in the nature of "a fair knock-out," and yet so pleasurable, except for the wear and tear about one's chances. If only he knew how far the old

boy really counted in the matter! To say: "My intentions are strictly honourable" would be old-fashioned; besides—the old fellow might have no right to hear it. They called him Guardy, but without knowing more he did not want to admit the old curmudgeon's right to interfere.

"Are you a relation of theirs, sir?"

Old Heythorp nodded.

Bob Pillin went on with desperation:

"I should like to know what your objection to me is."

The old man turned his head so far as he was able; a grim smile bristled the hairs about his lips, and twinkled in his eyes. What did he object to? Why—everything! Object to! That sleek head, those puppy-dog eyes, fattish red cheeks, high collars, pearl pin, spats, and drawl—pah! the imbecility, the smugness of his mug; no go, no devil in any of his sort, in any of these fish-veined, coddled-up young bloods, nothing but playing for safety! And he wheezed out:

"Milk and water masquerading as port wine."

Bob Pillin frowned.

It was almost too much for the composure even of a man of the world. That this paralytic old fellow should express contempt for his virility was really the last thing in jests. Luckily he could not

take it seriously. But suddenly he thought: 'What if he really has the power to stop my going there, and means to turn them against me!' And his heart quailed.

"Awfully sorry, sir," he said, "if you don't think I'm wild enough. Anything I can do for you in that line——"

The old man grunted; and realising that he had been quite witty, Bob Pillin went on:

"I know I'm not in debt, no entanglements, got a decent income, pretty good expectations and all that; but I can soon put that all right if I'm not fit without."

It was perhaps his first attempt at irony, and he could not help thinking how good it was.

But old Heythorp preserved a deadly silence. He looked like a stuffed man, a regular Aunt Sally sitting there, with the fixed red in his cheeks, his stivered hair, square block of a body, and no neck that you could see—only wanting the pipe in his mouth! Could there really be danger from such an old idol? The idol spoke:

"I'll give you a word of advice. Don't hang round there, or you'll burn your fingers. Remember me to your father. Good-night!"

The taxi had stopped before the house in Sefton Park. An insensate impulse to remain seated and argue the point fought in Bob Pillin with an

impulse to leap out, shake his fist in at the window, and walk off. He merely said, however:

"Thanks for the lift. Good-night!" And, getting out deliberately, he walked off.

Old Heythorp, waiting for the driver to help him up, thought:

'Fatter, but no more guts than his father!'

In his sanctum he sank at once into his chair. It was wonderfully still there every day at this hour; just the click of the coals, just the faintest ruffle from the wind in the trees of the park. And it was cosily warm, only the fire lightening the darkness. A drowsy beatitude pervaded the old man. A good day's work! A triumph—that young pup had said. Yes! Something of a triumph! He had held on, and won. And dinner to look forward to, yet. A nap—a nap! And soon, rhythmic, soft, sonorous, his breathing rose, with now and then that pathetic twitching of the old who dream.

III

1 §

When Bob Pillin emerged from the little front garden of 23, Millicent Villas ten days later, his sentiments were ravelled, and he could not get hold of an end to pull straight the stuff of his mind.

He had found Mrs. Larne and Phyllis in the sitting-room, and Phyllis had been crying; he was sure she had been crying; and that memory still infected the sentiments evoked by later happenings. Old Heythorp had said: "You'll burn your fingers." The process had begun. Having sent her daughter away on a pretext really a bit too thin, Mrs. Larne had installed him beside her scented bulk on the sofa, and poured into his ear such a tale of monetary woe and entanglement, such a mass of present difficulties and rosy prospects, that his brain still whirled, and only one thing emerged clearly—that she wanted fifty pounds, which she would repay him on quarter-day; for their Guardy had made a settlement by which, until the dear children came of age, she would have sixty pounds every quarter. It was only a question of a few weeks; he might ask Messrs. Scriven and Coles; they would tell him the security was quite safe. He certainly might ask Messrs. Scriven and Coles—they happened to be his father's solicitors; but it hardly seemed to touch the point. Bob Pillin had a certain shrewd caution, and the point was whether he was going to begin to lend money to a woman who, he could see, might borrow up to seventy times seven on the strength of his infatuation for her daughter. That was rather too strong! Yet, if he didn't—

she might take a sudden dislike to him, and where would he be then? Besides, would not a loan make his position stronger? And then—such is the effect of love even on the younger generation—that thought seemed to him unworthy. If he lent at all, it should be from chivalry—ulterior motives might go hang! And the memory of the tear-marks on Phyllis's pretty pale-pink cheeks; and her petulantly mournful: "Oh! young man, isn't money beastly!" scraped his heart, and ravished his judgment. All the same, fifty pounds was fifty pounds, and goodness knew how much more; and what did he know of Mrs. Larne, after all, except that she was a relative of old Heythorp's and wrote stories—told them too, if he was not mistaken? Perhaps it would be better to see Scrivens'. But again that absurd nobility assaulted him. Phyllis! Phyllis! Besides, were not settlements always drawn so that they refused to form security for anything? Thus, hampered and troubled, he hailed a cab. He was dining with the Ventnors on the Cheshire side, and would be late if he didn't get home sharp to dress.

Driving, white-tied and waistcoated, in his father's car, he thought with a certain contumely of the younger Ventnor girl, whom he had been wont to consider pretty before he knew Phyllis. And seated next her at dinner, he quite enjoyed

his new sense of superiority to her charms, and the ease with which he could chaff and be agreeable. And all the time he suffered from the suppressed longing which scarcely ever left him now, to think and talk of Phyllis. Ventnor's fizz was good and plentiful, his old Madeira absolutely first chop, and the only other man present a teetotal curate, who withdrew with the ladies to talk his parish shop. Favoured by these circumstances, and the perception that Ventnor was an agreeable fellow, Bob Pillin yielded to his secret itch to get near the subject of his affections.

"Do you happen," he said airily, "to know a Mrs. Larne—relative of old Heythorp's—rather a handsome woman—she writes stories."

Mr. Ventnor shook his head. A closer scrutiny than Bob Pillin's would have seen that he also moved his ears.

"Of old Heythorp's? Didn't know he had any, except his daughter, and that son of his in the Admiralty."

Bob Pillin felt the glow of his secret hobby spreading within him.

"She is, though—lives rather out of town; got a son and daughter. I thought you might know her stories—clever woman."

Mr. Ventnor smiled.

"Ah!" he said enigmatically, "these lady novelists! Does she make any money by them?"

Bob Pillin knew that to make money by writing meant success, but that not to make money by writing was artistic, and implied that you had private means, which perhaps was even more distinguished. And he said:

"Oh! she has private means, I know."

Mr. Ventnor reached for the Madeira.

"So she's a relative of old Heythorp's," he said. "He's a very old friend of your father's. He ought to go bankrupt, you know."

To Bob Pillin, glowing with passion and Madeira, the idea of bankruptcy seemed discreditable in connection with a relative of Phyllis. Besides, the old boy was far from that! Had he not just made this settlement on Mrs. Larne? And he said:

"I think you're mistaken. That's of the past."

Mr. Ventnor smiled.

"Will you bet?" he said.

Bob Pillin also smiled. "I should be bettin' on a certainty."

Mr. Ventnor passed his hand over his whiskered face. "Don't you believe it; he hasn't a mag to his name. Fill your glass."

Bob Pillin said, with a certain resentment:

"Well, I happen to know he's just made a set-

tlement of five or six thousand pounds. Don't know if you call that being bankrupt."

"What! On this Mrs. Larne?"

Confused, uncertain whether he had said something derogatory or indiscreet, or something which added distinction to Phyllis, Bob Pillin hesitated, then gave a nod.

Mr. Ventnor rose and extended his short legs before the fire.

"No, my boy," he said. "No!"

Unaccustomed to flat contradiction, Bob Pillin reddened.

"I'll bet you a tenner. Ask Scrivens'."

Mr. Ventnor ejaculated:

"Scrivens'—but they're not——" then, staring rather hard, he added: "I won't bet. You may be right. Scrivens' are your father's solicitors too, aren't they? Always been sorry he didn't come to me. Shall we join the ladies?" And to the drawing-room he preceded a young man more uncertain in his mind than on his feet. . . .

Charles Ventnor was not one to let you see that more was going on within than met the eye. But there was a good deal going on that evening, and after his conversation with young Bob he had occasion more than once to turn away and rub his hands together. When, after that second creditors' meeting, he had walked down the stair-

way which led to the offices of "The Island Navigation Company," he had been deep in thought. Short, squarely built, rather stout, with moustache and large mutton-chop whiskers of a red-brown, and a faint floridity in face and dress, he impressed at first sight only by a certain truly British vulgarity. One felt that here was a hail-fellow-well-met man who liked lunch and dinner, went to Scarborough for his summer holidays, sat on his wife, took his daughters out in a boat and was never sick. One felt that he went to church every Sunday morning, looked upwards as he moved through life, disliked the unsuccessful, and expanded with his second glass of wine. But then a clear look into his well-clothed face and red-brown eyes would give the feeling: 'There's something fulvous here; he might be a bit too foxy.' A third look brought the thought: 'He's certainly a bully.' He was not a large creditor of old Heythorp. With interest on the original, he calculated his claim at three hundred pounds —unredeemed shares in that old Ecuador mine. But he had waited for his money eight years, and could never imagine how it came about that he had been induced to wait so long. There had been, of course, for one who liked "big pots," a certain glamour about the personality of old Heythorp, still a bit of a swell in shipping circles, and a bit

of an aristocrat in Liverpool. But during the last year Charles Ventnor had realised that the old chap's star had definitely set—when that happens, of course, there is no more glamour, and the time has come to get your money. Weakness in oneself and others is despicable! Besides, he had food for thought, and descending the stairs he chewed it. He smelt a rat—creatures for which both by nature and profession he had a nose. Through Bob Pillin, on whom he sometimes dwelt in connection with his younger daughter, he knew that old Pillin and old Heythorp had been friends for thirty years and more. That, to an astute mind, suggested something behind this sale. The thought had already occurred to him when he read his copy of the report. A commission would be a breach of trust, of course, but there were ways of doing things; the old chap was devilish hard pressed, and human nature was human nature! His lawyerish mind habitually put two and two together. The old fellow had deliberately appointed to meet his creditors again just after the general meeting which would decide the purchase—had said he might do something for them then. Had that no significance?

In these circumstances Charles Ventnor had come to the meeting with eyes wide open and mouth tight closed. And he had watched. It was

certainly remarkable that such an old and feeble man, with no neck at all, who looked indeed as if he might go off with apoplexy any moment, should actually say that he "stood or fell" by this purchase, knowing that if he fell he would be a beggar. Why should the old chap be so keen on getting it through? It would do him personally no good, unless—Exactly! He had left the meeting, therefore, secretly confident that old Heythorp had got something out of this transaction which would enable him to make a substantial proposal to his creditors. So that when the old man had declared that he was going to make none, something had turned sour in his heart, and he had said to himself: "All right, you old rascal! You don't know C. V." The cavalier manner of that beggarly old rip, the defiant look of his deep little eyes, had put a polish on the rancour of one who prided himself on letting no man get the better of him. All that evening, seated on one side of the fire, while Mrs. Ventnor sat on the other, and the younger daughter played Gounod's Serenade on the violin—he cogitated. And now and again he smiled, but not too much. He did not see his way as yet, but had little doubt that before long he would. It would not be hard to knock that chipped old idol off his perch. There was already a healthy feeling among the shareholders that he

was past work and should be scrapped. The old chap should find that Charles V. was not to be defied; that when he got his teeth into a thing, he did not let it go. By hook or crook he would have the old man off his Boards, or his debt out of him as the price of leaving him alone. His life or his money—and the old fellow should determine which. With the memory of that defiance fresh within him, he almost hoped it might come to be the first, and turning to Mrs. Ventnor, he said abruptly:

"Have a little dinner Friday week, and ask young Pillin and the curate." He specified the curate, a teetotaller, because he had two daughters, and males and females must be paired, but he intended to pack him off after dinner to the drawing-room to discuss parish matters while he and Bob Pillin sat over their wine. What he expected to get out of the young man he did not as yet know.

On the day of the dinner, before departing for the office, he had gone to his cellar. Would three bottles of Perrier Jouet do the trick, or must he add one of the old Madeira? He decided to be on the safe side. A bottle or so of champagne went very little way with him personally, and young Pillin might be another.

The Madeira having done its work by turning

the conversation into such an admirable channel, he had cut it short for fear young Pillin might drink the lot or get wind of the rat. And when his guests were gone, and his family had retired, he stood staring into the fire, putting together the pieces of the puzzle. Five or six thousand pounds —six would be ten per cent. on sixty! Exactly! Scrivens'—young Pillin had said! But Crow & Donkin, not Scriven & Coles, were old Heythorp's solicitors. What could that mean, save that the old man wanted to cover the tracks of a secret commission, and had handled the matter through solicitors who did not know the state of his affairs! But why Pillin's solicitors? With this sale just going through, it must look deuced fishy to them too. Was it all a mare's nest, after all? In such circumstances he himself would have taken the matter to a London firm who knew nothing of anybody. Puzzled, therefore, and rather disheartened, feeling too that touch of liver which was wont to follow his old Madeira, he went up to bed and woke his wife to ask her why the dickens they couldn't always have soup like that!

Next day he continued to brood over his puzzle, and no fresh light came; but having a matter on which his firm and Scrivens' were in touch, he decided to go over in person, and see if he could surprise something out of them. Feeling, from

experience, that any really delicate matter would only be entrusted to the most responsible member of the firm, he had asked to see Scriven himself, and just as he had taken his hat to go, he said casually:

"By the way, you do some business for old Mr. Heythorp, don't you?"

Scriven, raising his eyebrows a little, mutmured: "Er—no," in exactly the tone Mr. Ventnor himself used when he wished to imply that though he didn't as a fact do business, he probably soon would. He knew therefore that the answer was a true one. And nonplussed, he hazarded:

"Oh! I thought you did, in regard to a Mrs. Larne."

This time he had certainly drawn blood of sorts, for down came Scriven's eyebrows, and he said:

"Mrs. Larne—we know a Mrs. Larne, but not in that connection. Why?"

"Oh! Young Pillin told me——"

"Young Pillin? Why, it's his——!" A little pause, and then: "Old Mr. Heythorp's solicitors are Crow & Donkin, I believe."

Mr. Ventnor held out his hand. "Yes, yes," he said; "good-bye. Glad to have got that matter settled up," and out he went, and down the

street, important, smiling. By George! He had got it! "It's his father"—Scriven had been going to say. What a plant! Exactly! Oh! neat! Old Pillin had made the settlement direct; and the solicitors were in the dark; that disposed of his difficulty about *them*. No money had passed between old Pillin and old Heythorp—not a penny. Oh! neat! But not neat enough for Charles Ventnor, who had that nose for rats. Then his smile died, and with a little chill he perceived that it was all based on supposition—not quite good enough to go on! What then? Somehow he must see this Mrs. Larne, or better—old Pillin himself. The point to ascertain was whether she had any connection of her own with Pillin. Clearly young Pillin didn't know of it; for, according to him, old Heythorp had made the settlement. By Jove! That old rascal was deep—all the more satisfaction in proving that he was not as deep as C. V. To unmask the old cheat was already beginning to seem in the nature of a public service. But on what pretext could he visit Pillin? A subscription to the Windeatt almshouses! That would make him talk in self-defence and he would take care not to press the request to the actual point of getting a subscription. He caused himself to be driven to the Pillin residence in Sefton Park. Ushered into a room on the ground floor, heat[illegible]

in American fashion, Mr. Ventnor unbuttoned his coat. A man of sanguine constitution, he found this hot-house atmosphere a little trying. And having sympathetically obtained Joe Pillin's reluctant refusal—Quite so! One could not indefinitely extend one's subscriptions even for the best of causes!—he said gently:

"By the way, you know Mrs. Larne, don't you?"

The effect of that simple shot surpassed his highest hopes. Joe Pillin's face, never highly coloured, turned a sort of grey; he opened his thin lips, shut them quickly, as birds do, and something seemed to pass with difficulty down his scraggy throat. The hollows, which nerve exhaustion delves in the cheeks of men whose cheek-bones are not high, increased alarmingly. For a moment he looked deathly; then, moistening his lips, he said:

"Larne—Larne? No, I don't seem——"

Mr. Ventnor, who had taken care to be drawing on his gloves, murmured:

"Oh! I thought—your son knows her; a relation of old Heythorp's," and he looked up.

Joe Pillin had his handkerchief to his mouth; he coughed feebly, then with more and more vigour:

"I'm in very poor health," he said, at last.

"I'm getting abroad at once. This cold's killing me. What name did you say?" And he remained with his handkerchief against his teeth.

Mr. Ventnor repeated:

"Larne. Writes stories."

Joe Pillin muttered into his handkerchief:

"Ah! H'm! No—I—no! My son knows all sorts of people. I shall have to try Mentone. Are you going? Good-bye! Good-bye! I'm sorry; ah! ha! My cough—ah! ha h'h'm! Very distressing. Ye—hes! My cough—ah! ha h'h'm! Most distressing. Ye—hes!"

Out in the drive Mr. Ventnor took a deep breath of the frosty air. Not much doubt now! The two names had worked like charms. This weakly old fellow would make a pretty witness, would simply crumple under cross-examination. What a contrast to that hoary old sinner Heythorp, whose brazenness nothing could affect. The rat was as large as life! And the only point was how to make the best use of it. Then—for his experience was wide—the possibility dawned on him, that after all, this Mrs. Larne might only have been old Pillin's mistress—or be his natural daughter, or have some other blackmailing hold on him. Any such connection would account for his agitation, for his denying her, for his son's ignorance. Only it wouldn't account for young

Pillin's saying that old Heythorp had made the settlement. He could only have got that from the woman herself. Still, to make absolutely sure, he had better try and see her. But how? It would never do to ask Bob Pillin for an introduction, after this interview with his father. He would have to go on his own and chance it. Wrote stories did she? Perhaps a newspaper would know her address; or the Directory would give it —not a common name! And, hot on the scent, he drove to a post office. Yes, there it was, right enough! "Larne, Mrs. R.—23, Millicent Villas." And thinking to himself: 'No time like the present,' he turned in that direction. The job was delicate. He must be careful not to do anything which might compromise his power of making public use of his knowledge. Yes—ticklish! What he did now must have a proper legal bottom. Still, anyway you looked at it, he had a *right* to investigate a fraud on himself as a shareholder of "The Island Navigation Company," and a fraud on himself as a creditor of old Heythorp. Quite! But suppose this Mrs. Larne was really entangled with old Pillin, and the settlement a mere reward of virtue, easy or otherwise. Well! in that case there'd be no secret commission to make public, and he needn't go further. So that, in either event, he would be all right. Only—how to intro-

duce himself? He might pretend he was a newspaper man wanting a story. No, that wouldn't do! He must not represent that he was what he was not, in case he had afterwards to justify his actions publicly, always a difficult thing, if you were not careful! At that moment there came into his mind a question Bob Pillin had asked the other night. "By the way, you can't borrow on a settlement, can you? Isn't there generally some clause against it?" Had this woman been trying to borrow from him on that settlement? But at this moment he reached the house, and got out of his cab still undecided as to how he was going to work the oracle. Impudence, constitutional and professional, sustained him in saying to the little maid:

"Mrs. Larne at home? Say Mr. Charles Ventnor, will you?"

His quick brown eyes took in the apparel of the passage which served for hall—the deep blue paper on the walls, lilac-patterned curtains over the doors, the well-known print of a nude young woman looking over her shoulder, and he thought: 'H'm! Distinctly tasty!' They noted, too, a small brown-and-white dog cowering in terror at the very end of the passage, and he murmured affably: "Fluffy! Come here, Fluffy!" till Carmen's teeth chattered in her head.

"Will you come in, sir?"

Mr. Ventnor ran his hand over his whiskers, and, entering a room, was impressed at once by its air of domesticity. On a sofa a handsome woman and a pretty young girl were surrounded by sewing apparatus and some white material. The girl looked up, but the elder lady rose.

Mr. Ventnor said easily:

"You know my young friend, Mr. Robert Pillin, I think."

The lady, whose bulk and bloom struck him to the point of admiration, murmured in a full, sweet drawl:

"Oh! Ye—es. Are you from Messrs. Scrivens'?"

With the swift reflection: 'As I thought!' Mr. Ventnor answered:

"Er—not exactly. I *am* a solicitor though; came just to ask about a certain settlement that Mr. Pillin tells me you're entitled under."

"Phyllis dear!"

Seeing the girl about to rise from underneath the white stuff, Mr. Ventnor said quickly:

"Pray don't disturb yourself—just a formality!" It had struck him at once that the lady would have to speak the truth in the presence of this third party, and he went on: "Quite recent, I think. This'll be your first interest—on six thou-

sand pounds? Is that right?" And at the limpid assent of that rich, sweet voice, he thought: 'Fine woman; what eyes!'

"Thank you; that's quite enough. I can go to Scrivens' for any detail. Nice young fellow, Bob Pillin, isn't he?" He saw the girl's chin tilt, and Mrs. Larne's full mouth curling in a smile.

"Delightful young man; we're very fond of him."

And he proceeded:

"I'm quite an old friend of his; have you known him long?"

"Oh! no. How long, Phyllis, since we met him at Guardy's? About a month. But he's so unaffected—quite at home with us. A *nice* fellow."

Mr. Ventnor murmured:

"Very different from his father, isn't he?"

"Is he? We don't know his father; he's a shipowner, I think."

Mr. Ventnor rubbed his hands: "Ye—es," he said, "just giving up—a warm man. Young Pillin's a lucky fellow—only son. So you met him at old Mr. Heythorp's. I know him too—relation of yours, I believe."

"Our dear Guardy—such a wonderful man."

Mr. Ventnor echoed: "Wonderful—regular old Roman."

"Oh! but he's so *kind!*" Mrs. Larne lifted the

white stuff: "Look what he's given this naughty gairl!"

Mr. Ventnor murmured: "Charming! Charming! Bob Pillin said, I think, that Mr. Heythorp was your settlor."

One of those little clouds which visit the brows of women who have owed money in their time passed swiftly athwart Mrs. Larne's eyes. For a moment they seemed saying: 'Don't you want to know too much?' Then they slid from under it.

"Won't you sit down?" she said. "You must forgive our being at work."

Mr. Ventnor, who had need of sorting his impressions, shook his head.

"Thank you; I must be getting on. Then Messrs. Scriven can—a mere formality! Good-bye! Good-bye, Miss Larne. I'm sure the dress will be most becoming."

And with memories of a too clear look from the girl's eyes, of a warm firm pressure from the woman's hand, Mr. Ventnor backed towards the door and passed away just in time to avoid hearing in two voices:

"What a nice lawyer!"

"What a horrid man!"

Back in his cab, he continued to rub his hands. No, she *didn't* know old Pillin! That was certain;

not from her words, but from her face. She wanted to know him, or about him, anyway. She was trying to hook young Bob for that sprig of a girl—it was clear as mud. H'm! it would astonish his young friend to hear that he had called. Well, let it! And a curious mixture of emotions beset Mr. Ventnor. He saw the whole thing now so plainly, and really could not refrain from a certain admiration. The law had been properly diddled! There was nothing to prevent a man from settling money on a woman he had never seen; and so old Pillin's settlement could probably not be upset. But old Heythorp could. It was neat, though, oh! neat! And that was a fine woman—remarkably! He had a sort of feeling that if only the settlement had been in danger, it might have been worth while to have made a bargain—a woman like that could have made it worth while! And he believed her quite capable of entertaining the proposition! Her eye! Pity—quite a pity! Mrs. Ventnor was not a wife who satisfied every aspiration. But alas! the settlement *was* safe. This baulking of the sentiment of love, whipped up, if anything, the longing for justice in Mr. Ventnor. That old chap should feel his teeth now. As a piece of investigation it was not so bad—not so bad at all! He had had a bit of luck, of course,—no, not luck—just that knack

of doing the right thing at the right moment which marks a real genius for affairs.

But getting into his train to return to Mrs. Ventnor, he thought: 'A woman like that would have been——!' And he sighed.

2 §

With a neatly written cheque for fifty pounds in his pocket Bob Pillin turned in at 23, Millicent Villas on the afternoon after Mr. Ventnor's visit. Chivalry had won the day. And he rang the bell with an elation which astonished him, for he knew he was doing a soft thing.

"Mrs. Larne is out, sir; Miss Phyllis is at home."

His heart leaped.

"Oh—h! I'm sorry. I wonder if she'd see me?"

The little maid answered:

"I think she's been washin' 'er 'air, sir, but it may be dry be now. I'll see."

Bob Pillin stood stock still beneath the young woman on the wall. He could scarcely breathe. If her hair were not dry—how awful! Suddenly he heard floating down a clear but smothered: "Oh! Gefoozleme!" and other words which he could not catch. The little maid came running down.

"Miss Phyllis says, sir, she'll be with you in a jiffy. And I was to tell you that Master Jock is loose, sir."

Bob Pillin answered "Tha—anks," and passed into the drawing-room. He went to the bureau, took an envelope, enclosed the cheque, and addressing it: "Mrs. Larne," replaced it in his pocket. Then he crossed over to the mirror. Never till this last month had he really doubted his own face; but now he wanted for it things he had never wanted. It had too much flesh and colour. It did not reflect his passion. This was a handicap. With a narrow white piping round his waistcoat opening, and a buttonhole of tuberoses, he had tried to repair its deficiencies. But do what he would, he was never easy about himself nowadays, never up to that pitch which could make him confident in her presence. And until this month to lack confidence had never been his wont. A clear, high, mocking voice said:

"Oh—h! Conceited young man!"

And spinning round he saw Phyllis in the doorway. Her light brown hair was fluffed out on her shoulders, so that he felt a kind of fainting-sweet sensation, and murmured inarticulately:

"Oh! I say—how jolly!"

"Lawks! It's awful! Have you come to see mother?"

Balanced between fear and daring, conscious of a scent of hay and verbena and camomile, Bob Pillin stammered:

"Ye—es. I—I'm glad she's not in, though."

Her laugh seemed to him terribly unfeeling.

"Oh! oh! Don't be foolish. Sit down. Isn't washing one's head awful?"

Bob Pillin answered feebly:

"Of course, I haven't much experience."

Her mouth opened.

"Oh! You *are*—aren't you?"

And he thought desperately: 'Dare I—oughtn't I—couldn't I somehow take her hand or put my arm round her, or something?' Instead, he sat very rigid at his end of the sofa, while she sat lax and lissom at the other, and one of those crises of paralysis which beset would-be lovers fixed him to the soul.

Sometimes during this last month memories of a past existence, when chaff and even kisses came readily to the lips, and girls were fair game, would make him think: 'Is she really such an innocent? Doesn't she really want me to kiss her?' Alas! such intrusions lasted but a moment before a blast of awe and chivalry withered them, and a strange and tragic delicacy—like nothing he had ever known—resumed its sway. And suddenly he heard her say:

"Why do you know such awful men?"

"What? I don't know any *awful* men."

"Oh yes, you do; one came here yesterday; he had whiskers, and he was awful."

"Whiskers?" His soul revolted in disclaimer. "I believe I only know one man with whiskers—a lawyer."

"Yes—that was him; a perfectly horrid man. Mother didn't mind him, but *I* thought he was a beast."

"Ventnor! Came here? How d'you mean?"

"He did; about some business of yours, too." Her face had clouded over. Bob Pillin had of late been harassed by the still-born beginning of a poem:

> "I rode upon my way and saw
> A maid who watched me from the door."

It never grew longer, and was prompted by the feeling that her face was like an April day. The cloud which came on it now was like an April cloud, as if a bright shower of rain must follow. Brushing aside the two distressful lines, he said:

"Look here, Miss Larne—Phyllis—look here!"

"All right, I'm looking!"

"What does it mean—how did he come? What did he say?"

She shook her head, and her hair quivered; the

scent of camomile, verbena, hay was wafted; then looking at her lap, she muttered:

"I wish you wouldn't—I wish mother wouldn't —I hate it. Oh! Money! Beastly—beastly!" and a tearful sigh shivered itself into Bob Pillin's reddening ears.

"I say—don't! And do tell me, because——"

"Oh! you *know*."

"I don't—I don't know anything at all. I never——"

Phyllis looked up at him. "Don't tell fibs; you know mother's borrowing money from you, and it's hateful!"

A desire to lie roundly, a sense of the cheque in his pocket, a feeling of injustice, the emotion of pity, and a confused and black astonishment about Ventnor, caused Bob Pillin to stammer:

'Well, I'm d——d!" and to miss the look which Phyllis gave him through her lashes—a look saying:

"Ah! that's better!"

"I *am* d——d! Look here! D'you mean to say that Ventnor came here about my lending money? I never said a word to him——"

"There you see—you *are* lending!"

He clutched his hair.

"We've got to have this out," he added.

"Not by the roots! Oh! you do look funny.

I've never seen you with your hair untidy. Oh! oh!"

Bob Pillin rose and paced the room. In the midst of his emotion he could not help seeing himself sidelong in the mirror; and on pretext of holding his head in both his hands, tried earnestly to restore his hair. Then coming to a halt he said:

"Suppose I *am* lending money to your mother, what does it matter? It's only till quarter-day. Anybody might want money."

Phyllis did not raise her face.

"Why are you lending it?"

"Because—because—why shouldn't I?" and diving suddenly, he seized her hands.

She wrenched them free; and with the emotion of despair, Bob Pillin took out the envelope.

"If you like," he said, "I'll tear this up. I don't want to lend it, if you don't want me to; but I thought—I thought——" It was for her alone he had been going to lend this money!

Phyllis murmured through her hair:

"Yes! You thought that *I*—that's what's so hateful!"

Apprehension pierced his mind.

"Oh! I never—I swear I never——"

"Yes, you did; you thought I wanted you to lend it."

She jumped up, and brushed past him into the window.

So she thought she was being used as a decoy! That was awful—especially since it was true. He knew well enough that Mrs. Larne was working his admiration for her daughter for all that it was worth. And he said with simple fervour:

"What rot!" It produced no effect, and at his wits' end, he almost shouted: "Look, Phyllis! If you don't want me to—here goes!" Phyllis turned. Tearing the envelope across he threw the bits into the fire. "There it is," he said.

Her eyes grew round; she said in an awed voice: "Oh!"

In a sort of agony of honesty he said:

"It was only a cheque. Now you've got your way."

Staring at the fire she answered slowly:

"I expect you'd better go before mother comes."

Bob Pillin's mouth fell ajar; he secretly agreed, but the idea of sacrificing a moment alone with her was intolerable, and he said hardily:

"No, I shall stick it!"

Phyllis sneezed.

"My hair isn't a bit dry," and she sat down on the fender with her back to the fire.

A certain spirituality had come into Bob Pil-

lin's face. If only he could get that wheeze off: "Phyllis is my only joy!" or even: "Phyllis—do you—won't you—mayn't I?" But nothing came —nothing.

And suddenly she said:

"Oh! don't breathe so loud; it's awful!"

"Breathe? I wasn't!"

"You were; just like Carmen when she's dreaming."

He had walked three steps towards the door, before he thought: 'What does it matter? I can stand anything from her'; and walked the three steps back again.

She said softly:

"Poor young man!"

He answered gloomily:

"I suppose you realise that this may be the last time you'll see me?"

"Why? I thought you were going to take us to the theatre."

"I don't know whether your mother will—after——"

Phyllis gave a little clear laugh.

"You don't know mother. Nothing makes any difference to her."

And Bob Pillin muttered:

"I see." He did not, but it was of no consequence. Then the thought of Ventnor again

ousted all others. What on earth—how on earth! He searched his mind for what he could possibly have said the other night. Surely he had not asked him to do anything; certainly not given him their address. There was something very odd about it that had jolly well got to be cleared up! And he said:

"Are you sure the name of that Johnny who came here yesterday was Ventnor?"

Phyllis nodded.

"And he was short, and had whiskers?"

"Yes; red, and red eyes."

He murmured reluctantly:

"It must be him. Jolly good cheek; I simply can't understand. I shall go and see him. How on earth did he know your address?"

"I expect you gave it him."

"I did not. I won't have you thinking me a squirt."

Phyllis jumped up. "Oh! Lawks! Here's mother!" Mrs. Larne was coming up the garden. Bob Pillin made for the door. "Good-bye," he said; "I'm going." But Mrs. Larne was already in the hall. Enveloping him in fur and her rich personality, she drew him with her into the drawing-room, where the back window was open and Phyllis gone.

"I hope," she said, "those naughty children

have been making you comfortable. That nice lawyer of yours came yesterday. He seemed quite satisfied."

Very red above his collar, Bob Pillin stammered:

"I never told him to; he isn't my lawyer. I don't know what it means."

Mrs. Larne smiled. "My dear boy, it's all right. You needn't be so squeamish. I want it to be quite on a business footing."

Restraining a fearful inclination to blurt out: "It's not going to be on any footing!" Bob Pillin mumbled: "I must go; I'm late."

"And when will you be able——?"

"Oh! I'll—I'll send—I'll write. Good-bye!" And suddenly he found that Mrs. Larne had him by the lapel of his coat. The scent of violets and fur was overpowering, and the thought flashed through him: 'I believe she only wanted to take money off old Joseph in the Bible. I can't leave my coat in her hands! What shall I do?'

Mrs. Larne was murmuring:

"It would be *so* sweet of you if you could manage it to-day"; and her hand slid over his chest. "Oh! You *have* brought your cheque-book—what a nice boy!"

Bob Pillin took it out in desperation, and, sitting down at the bureau, wrote a cheque similar

to that which he had torn and burned. A warm kiss lighted on his eyebrow, his head was pressed for a moment to a furry bosom; a hand took the cheque; a voice said: "How delightful!" and a sigh immersed him in a bath of perfume. Backing to the door, he gasped:

"Don't mention it; and—and *don't tell Phyllis, please.* Good-bye!"

Once through the garden gate, he thought: 'By gum! I've done it now. That Phyllis should know about it at all! That beast Ventnor!'

His face grew almost grim. He would go and see what that meant anyway!

3 §

Mr. Ventnor had not left his office when his young friend's card was brought to him. Tempted for a moment to deny his own presence, he thought: 'No! What's the good? Bound to see him some time!' If he had not exactly courage, he had that peculiar blend of self-confidence and insensibility which must needs distinguish those who follow the law; nor did he ever forget that he was in the right.

"Show him in!" he said.

He would be quite bland, but young Pillin might whistle for an explanation; he was still tor-

mented, too, by the memory of rich curves and moving lips, and the possibilities of better acquaintanceship.

While shaking the young man's hand his quick and fulvous eye detected at once the discomposure behind that mask of cheek and collar, and relapsing into one of those swivel chairs which give one an advantage over men more statically seated, he said:

"You look pretty bobbish. Anything I can do for you?"

Bob Pillin, in the fixed chair of the consultor, nursed his bowler on his knee.

"Well, yes, there is. I've just been to see Mrs. Larne."

Mr. Ventnor did not flinch.

"Ah! Nice woman; pretty daughter, too!" And into those words he put a certain meaning. He never waited to be bullied. Bob Pillin felt the pressure of his blood increasing.

"Look here, Ventnor," he said, "I want an explanation."

"What of?"

"Why, of your going there, and using my name, and God knows what."

Mr. Ventnor gave his chair two little twiddles before he said:

"Well, you won't get it."

Bob Pillin remained for a moment taken aback; then he muttered resolutely:

"It's not the conduct of a gentleman."

Every man has his illusions, and no man likes them disturbed. The gingery tint underlying Mr. Ventnor's colouring overlaid it; even the whites of his eyes grew red.

"Oh!" he said; "indeed! You mind your own business, will you?"

"It is my business—very much so. You made use of my name, and I don't choose——"

"The devil you don't! Now, I tell you what ——" Mr. Ventnor leaned forward—"you'd better hold your tongue, and not exasperate me. I'm a good-tempered man, but I won't stand your impudence."

Clenching his bowler hat, and only kept in his seat by that sense of something behind, Bob Pillin ejaculated:

"Impudence! That's good—after what you did! Look here, why did you? It's so extraordinary!"

Mr. Ventnor answered:

"Oh! is it? You wait a bit, my friend!"

Still more moved by the mystery of this affair, Bob Pillin could only mutter:

"I never gave you their address; we were only talking about old Heythorp."

And at the smile which spread between Mr. Ventnor's whiskers, he jumped up, crying:

"It's not the thing, and you're not going to put me off. I insist on an explanation."

Mr. Ventnor leaned back, crossing his stout legs, joining the tips of his thick fingers. In this attitude he was always self-possessed.

"You do—do you?"

"Yes. You must have had some reason."

Mr. Ventnor gazed up at him.

"I'll give you a piece of advice, young cock, and charge you nothing for it, too: Ask no questions, and you'll be told no lies. And here's another: Go away before you forget yourself again."

The natural stolidity of Bob Pillin's face was only just proof against this speech. He said thickly:

"If you go there again and use my name, I'll —— Well, it's lucky for you you're not my age. Anyway I'll relieve you of my acquaintanceship in future. Good-evening!" and he went to the door. Mr. Ventnor had risen.

"Very well," he said loudly. "Good riddance! You wait and see which boot the leg is on!"

But Bob Pillin was gone, leaving the lawyer with a very red face, a very angry heart, and a vague sense of disorder in his speech. Not only Bob Pillin, but his tender aspirations had all left

him; he no longer dallied with the memory of Mrs. Larne, but like a man and a Briton thought only of how to get his own back, and punish evildoers. The atrocious words of his young friend, "It's not the conduct of a gentleman," festered in the heart of one who was made gentle not merely by nature but by Act of Parliament, and he registered a solemn vow to wipe the insult out, if not with blood, with verjuice. It was his duty, and they should d——d well see him do it!

IV

1 §

Sylvanus Heythorp seldom went to bed before one or rose before eleven. The latter habit alone kept his valet from handing in the resignation which the former habit prompted almost every night.

Propped on his pillows in a crimson dressing-gown, and freshly shaved, he looked more Roman than he ever did, except in his bath. Having disposed of coffee, he was wont to read his letters, and *The Morning Post*, for he had always been a Tory, and could not stomach paying a halfpenny for his news. Not that there were many letters—when a man has reached the age of eighty, who should write to him, except to ask for money?

It was Valentine's Day. Through his bedroom window he could see the trees of the park, where the birds were in song, though he could not hear them. He had never been interested in Nature—full-blooded men with short necks seldom are.

This morning indeed there *were* two letters, and he opened that which smelt of something. Inside was a thing like a Christmas card, save that the naked babe had in his hands a bow and arrow, and words coming out of his mouth: "To be your Valentine." There was also a little pink note with one blue forget-me-not printed at the top. It ran:

"Dearest Guardy,—I'm sorry this is such a mangy little valentine; I couldn't go out to get it because I've got a beastly cold, so I asked Jock, and the pig bought this. The satin is simply scrumptious. If you don't come and see me in it some time soon, I shall come and show it to you. I wish I had a moustache, because my top lip feels just like a matchbox, but it's rather ripping having breakfast in bed. Mr. Pillin's taking us to the theatre the day after to-morrow evening. Isn't it nummy! I'm going to have rum and honey for my cold.

"Good-bye,

"Your Phyllis."

So this that quivered in his thick fingers, too insensitive to feel it, was a valentine for *him!* Forty years ago that young thing's grandmother had given him his last. It made him out a very old chap! Forty years ago! Had that been himself living then? And himself, who, as a youth came on the town in 'forty-five? Not a thought, not a feeling the same! They said you changed your body every seven years. The mind with it, too, perhaps! Well, he had come to the last of his bodies, now! And that holy woman had been urging him to take it to Bath, with her face as long as a tea-tray, and some gammon from that doctor of his. Too full a habit—dock his port—no alcohol—might go off in a coma any night! Knock off—not he! Rather die any day than turn teetotaller! When a man had nothing left in life except his dinner, his bottle, his cigar, and the dreams they gave him—these doctors forsooth must want to cut them off! No, no! *Carpe diem!* while you lived, get something out of it. And now that he had made all the provision he could for those youngsters, his life was no good to anyone but himself; and the sooner he went off the better, if he ceased to enjoy what there was left, or lost the power to say: "I'll do this and that, and you be jiggered!" Keep a stiff lip until you crashed, and then go clean! He sounded the bell

beside him twice—for Molly, not his man. And when the girl came in, and stood, pretty in her print frock, her fluffy over-fine dark hair escaping from under her cap, he gazed at her in silence.

"Yes, sirr?"

"Want to look at you, that's all."

"Oh! an' I'm not tidy, sirr."

"Never mind. Had your valentine?"

"No, sirr; who would send me one, then?"

"Haven't you a young man?"

"Well, I might. But he's over in my country."

"What d'you think of this?"

He held out the little boy.

The girl took the card and scrutinised it reverently; she said in a detached voice:

"Indeed, an' ut's pretty, too."

"Would you like it?"

"Oh! if 'tis not taking ut from you."

Old Heythorp shook his head, and pointed to the dressing-table.

"Over there—you'll find a sovereign. Little present for a good girl."

She uttered a deep sigh. "Oh! sirr, 'tis too much; 'tis kingly."

"Take it."

She took it, and came back, her hands clasping the sovereign and the valentine, in an attitude as of prayer.

The old man's gaze rested on her with satisfaction.

"I like pretty faces—can't bear sour ones. Tell Meller to get my bath ready."

When she had gone he took up the other letter —some lawyer's writing, and opening it with the usual difficulty, read:

"*February 13th, 1905.*

"Sir,—Certain facts having come to my knowledge, I deem it my duty to call a special meeting of the shareholders of 'The Island Navigation Coy.,' to consider circumstances in connection with the purchase of Mr. Joseph Pillin's fleet. And I give you notice that at this meeting your conduct will be called in question.

"I am, Sir,

"Yours faithfully,

"Charles Ventnor.

"Sylvanus Heythorp, Esq."

Having read this missive, old Heythorp remained some minutes without stirring. Ventnor! That solicitor chap who had made himself unpleasant at the creditors' meetings!

There are men whom a really bad bit of news at once stampedes out of all power of coherent thought and action, and men who at first simply do not take it in. Old Heythorp took it in fast

enough; coming from a lawyer it was about as nasty as it could be. But, at once, with stoic wariness his old brain began casting round. What did this fellow really know? And what exactly could he do? One thing was certain; even if he knew everything, he couldn't upset that settlement. The youngsters were all right. The old man grasped the fact that only his own position was at stake. But this was enough in all conscience; a name which had been before the public fifty odd years—income, independence, more perhaps. It would take little, seeing his age and feebleness, to make his Companies throw him over. But what had the fellow got hold of? How decide whether or no to take notice; to let him do his worst, or try and get into touch with him? And what was the fellow's motive? He held ten shares! That would never make a man take all this trouble, and over a purchase which was really first-rate business for the Company. Yes! His conscience was quite clean. He had not betrayed his Company—on the contrary, had done it a good turn, got them four sound ships at a low price—against much opposition. That he might have done the Company a better turn, and got the ships at fifty-four thousand, did not trouble him—the six thousand was a deuced sight better employed; and he had not pocketed a penny piece

himself! But the fellow's motive? Spite? Looked like it. Spite, because he had been disappointed of his money, and defied into the bargain! H'm! If that were so, he might still be got to blow cold again. His eyes lighted on the pink note with the blue forget-me-not. It marked as it were the high-water mark of what was left to him of life; and this other letter in his hand—by Jove!—low-water mark! And with a deep and rumbling sigh he thought: 'No, I'm not going to be beaten by this fellow.'

"Your bath is ready, sir."

Crumpling the two letters into the pocket of his dressing-gown, he said:

"Help me up; and telephone to Mr. Farney to be good enough to come round." . . .

An hour later, when the secretary entered, his chairman was sitting by the fire perusing the articles of association. And, waiting for him to look up, watching the articles shaking in that thick, feeble hand, the secretary had one of those moments of philosophy not too frequent with his kind. Some said the only happy time of life was when you had no passions, nothing to hope and live for. But did you really ever reach such a stage? The old chairman, for instance, still had his passion for getting his own way, still had his prestige, and set a lot of store by it! And he said:

"Good morning, sir; I hope you're all right in this east wind. The purchase is completed."

"Best thing the company ever did. Have you heard from a shareholder called Ventnor. You know the man I mean?"

"No, sir. I haven't."

"Well! You may get a letter that'll make you open your eyes. An impudent scoundrel! Just write at my dictation."

"*February 14th*, 1905.

"CHARLES VENTNOR, Esq.

"SIR,—I have your letter of yesterday's date, the contents of which I am at a loss to understand. My solicitors will be instructed to take the necessary measures."

'Phew! What's all this about?' the secretary thought.

"Yours truly . . . I'll sign."

And the shaky letters closed the page:

"SYLVANUS HEYTHORP."

"Post that as you go."

"Anything else I can do for you, sir?"

"Nothing, except to let me know if you hear from this fellow."

When the secretary had gone the old man thought: 'So! The ruffian hasn't called the meeting yet. That'll bring him round here fast enough

if it's his money he wants—blackmailing scoundrel!'

"Mr. Pillin, sir; and will you wait lunch, or will you have it in the dining-room?"

"In the dining-room."

At sight of that death's-head of a fellow, old Heythorp felt a sort of pity. He looked bad enough already—and this news would make him look worse. Joe Pillin glanced round at the two closed doors.

"How are you, Sylvanus? I'm very poorly." He came closer, and lowered his voice: "Why did you get me to make that settlement? I must have been mad. I've had a man called Ventnor—I didn't like his manner. He asked me if I knew a Mrs. Larne."

"Ha! What did you say?"

"What could I say? I *don't* know her. But why did he ask?"

"Smells a rat."

Joe Pillin grasped the edge of the table with both hands.

"Oh!" he murmured. "Oh! don't say that!"

Old Heythorp held out to him the crumpled letter.

When he had read it Joe Pillin sat down abruptly before the fire.

"Pull yourself together, Joe; they can't touch

you, and they can't upset either the purchase or the settlement. They can upset me, that's all."

Joe Pillin answered, with trembling lips:

"How you can sit there, and look the same as ever! Are you sure they can't touch me?"

Old Heyworth nodded grimly.

"They talk of an Act, but they haven't passed it yet. They might prove a breach of trust against me. But I'll diddle them. Keep your pecker up, and get off abroad."

"Yes, yes. I must. I'm very bad. I was going to-morrow. But I don't know, I'm sure, with this hanging over me. My son knowing her makes it worse. He picks up with everybody. He knows this man Ventnor too. And I daren't say anything to Bob. What are you thinking of, Sylvanus? You look very funny?"

Old Heythorp seemed to rouse himself from a sort of coma.

"I want my lunch," he said. "Will you stop and have some?"

Joe Pillin stammered out:

"Lunch! I don't know when I shall eat again. What are you going to do, Sylvanus?"

"Bluff the beggar out of it."

"But suppose you can't?"

"Buy him off. He's one of my creditors."

Joe Pillin stared at him afresh. "You always

had such nerve," he said yearningly. "Do you ever wake up between two and four? I do—and everything's black."

"Put a good stiff nightcap on, my boy, before going to bed."

"Yes; I sometimes wish I was less temperate. But I couldn't stand it. I'm told your doctor forbids you alcohol."

"He does. That's why I drink it."

Joe Pillin, brooding over the fire, said: "This meeting—d'you think they mean to have it? D'you think this man really knows? If my name gets into the newspapers——" but encountering his old friend's deep little eyes, he stopped. "So you advise me to get off to-morrow, then?"

Old Heythorp nodded.

"Your lunch is served, sir."

Joe Pillin started violently, and rose.

"Well, good-bye, Sylvanus—good-bye! I don't suppose I shall be back till the summer, if I ever come back!" He sank his voice: "I shall rely on you. You won't let them, will you?"

Old Heythorp lifted his hand, and Joe Pillin put into that swollen shaking paw his pale and spindly fingers. "I wish I had your pluck," he said sadly. "Good-bye, Sylvanus," and turning, he passed out.

Old Heythorp thought: 'Poor shaky chap. All

to pieces at the first shot!' And, going to his lunch, ate more heavily than usual.

2 §

Mr. Ventnor, on reaching his office and opening his letters, found, as he had anticipated, one from "that old rascal." Its contents excited in him the need to know his own mind. Fortunately this was not complicated by a sense of dignity—he only had to consider the position with an eye on not being made to *look* a fool. The point was simply whether he set more store by his money than by his desire for—er—justice. If not, he had merely to convene the special meeting, and lay before it the plain fact that Mr. Joseph Pillin, selling his ships for sixty thousand pounds, had just made a settlement of six thousand pounds on a lady whom he did not know, a daughter, ward, or what-not—of the purchasing company's chairman, who had said, moreover, at the general meeting, that he stood or fell by the transaction; he had merely to do this, and demand that an explanation be required from the old man of such a startling coincidence. Convinced that no explanation would hold water, he felt sure that his action would be at once followed by the collapse, if nothing more, of that old image, and the infliction of a nasty slur on old Pillin and his hopeful

son. On the other hand, three hundred pounds was money; and, if old Heythorp were to say to him: "What do you want to make this fuss for—here's what I owe you!" could a man of business and the world let his sense of justice—however he might itch to have it satisfied—stand in the way of what was after all also his sense of justice?—for this money had been owing to him for the deuce of a long time. In this dilemma, the words: "My solicitors will be instructed" were of notable service in helping him to form a decision, for he had a certain dislike of other solicitors, and an intimate knowledge of the law of libel and slander; if by any remote chance there should be a slip between the cup and the lip, Charles Ventnor might be in the soup—a position which he deprecated both by nature and profession. High thinking, therefore, decided him at last to answer thus:

"*February 15th, 1905.*

"SIR,—I have received your note. I think it may be fair, before taking further steps in this matter, to ask you for a personal explanation of the circumstances to which I alluded. I therefore propose with your permission to call on you at your private residence at five o'clock to-morrow afternoon. "Yours faithfully,

"CHARLES VENTNOR.

"SYLVANUS HEYTHORP, Esq."

Having sent this missive, and arranged in his mind the damning, if circumstantial, evidence he had accumulated, he awaited the hour with confidence, for his nature was not lacking in the cock-surety of a Briton. All the same, he dressed himself particularly well that morning, putting on a blue and white striped waistcoat which, with a cream-coloured tie, set off his fulvous whiskers and full blue eyes; and he lunched, if anything, more fully than his wont, eating a stronger cheese and taking a glass of special Club ale. He took care to be late, too, to show the old fellow that his coming at all was in the nature of an act of grace. A strong scent of hyacinths greeted him in the hall; and Mr. Ventnor, who was an amateur of flowers, stopped to put his nose into a fine bloom and think uncontrollably of Mrs. Larne. Pity! The things one had to give up in life—fine women—one thing and another. Pity! The thought inspired in him a timely anger; and he followed the servant, intending to stand no nonsense from this paralytic old rascal.

The room he entered was lighted by a bright fire, and a single electric lamp with an orange shade on a table covered by a black satin cloth. There were heavily gleaming oil paintings on the walls, a heavy old brass chandelier without candles, heavy dark red curtains, and an indefinable

scent of burnt acorns, coffee, cigars, and old man. He became conscious of a candescent spot on the far side of the hearth, where the light fell on old Heythorp's thick white hair.

"Mr. Ventnor, sir."

The candescent spot moved. A voice said: "Sit down."

Mr. Ventnor sat in an armchair on the opposite side of the fire; and, finding a kind of somnolence creeping over him, pinched himself. He wanted all his wits about him.

The old man was speaking in that extinct voice of his, and Mr. Ventnor said rather pettishly:

"Beg pardon, I don't get you."

Old Heythorp's voice swelled with sudden force:

"Your letters are Greek to me."

"Oh! indeed, I think we can soon make them into plain English!"

"Sooner the better."

Mr. Ventnor passed through a moment of indecision. Should he lay his cards on the table? It was not his habit, and the proceeding was sometimes attended with risk. The knowledge, however, that he could always take them up again, seeing there was no third person here to testify that he had laid them down, decided him, and he said:

"Well, Mr. Heythorp, the long and short of the matter is this: Our friend Mr. Pillin paid you a commission of ten per cent. on the sale of his ships. Oh! yes. He settled the money, not on you, but on your relative Mrs. Larne and her children. This, as you know, is a breach of trust on your part."

The old man's voice: "Where did you get hold of that cock-and-bull story?" brought him to his feet before the fire.

"It won't do, Mr. Heythorp. My witnesses are Mr. Pillin, Mrs. Larne, and Mr. Scriven."

"What have you come here for, then—blackmail?"

Mr. Ventnor straightened his waistcoat; a rush of conscious virtue had dyed his face.

"Oh! you take that tone," he said, "do you? You think you can ride roughshod over everything? Well, you're very much mistaken. I advise you to keep a civil tongue and consider your position, or I'll make a beggar of you. I'm not sure this isn't a case for a prosecution!"

"Gammon!"

The choler in Charles Ventnor kept him silent for a moment; then he burst out:

"Neither gammon nor spinach. You owe me three hundred pounds, you've owed it me for years, and you have the impudence to take this

attitude with me, have you? Now, I never bluster; I say what I mean. You just listen to me. Either you pay me what you owe me at once, or I call this meeting and make what I know public. You'll very soon find out where you are. And a good thing, too, for a more unscrupulous—unscrupulous——" he paused for breath.

Occupied with his own emotion, he had not observed the change in old Heythorp's face. The imperial on that lower lip was bristling, the crimson of those cheeks had spread to the roots of his white hair. He grasped the arms of his chair, trying to rise; his swollen hands trembled; a little saliva escaped one corner of his lips. And the words came out as if shaken by his teeth:

"So—so—you—you bully me!"

Conscious that the interview had suddenly passed from the phase of negotiation, Mr. Ventnor looked hard at his opponent. He saw nothing but a decrepit, passionate, crimson-faced old man at bay, and all the instincts of one with everything on his side boiled up in him. The miserable old turkey-cock—the apoplectic image! And he said:

"And you'll do no good for yourself by getting into a passion. At your age, and in your condition, I recommend a little prudence. Now just take my terms quietly, or you know what'll happen. I'm

not to be intimidated by any of your airs." And seeing that the old man's rage was such that he simply could not speak, he took the opportunity of going on: "I don't care two straws which you do—I'm out to show you who's master. If you think in your dotage you can domineer any longer—well, you'll find two can play at that game. Come, now, which are you going to do?"

The old man had sunk back in his chair, and only his little deep-blue eyes seemed living. Then he moved one hand, and Mr. Ventnor saw that he was fumbling to reach the button of an electric bell at the end of a cord. 'I'll show him,' he thought, and stepping forward, he put it out of reach.

Thus frustrated, the old man remained motionless, staring up. The word "blackmail" resumed its buzzing in Mr. Ventnor's ears. The impudence —the consummate impudence of it from this fraudulent old ruffian with one foot in bankruptcy and one foot in the grave, if not in the dock.

"Yes," he said, "it's never too late to learn; and for once you've come up against someone a leetle bit too much for you. Haven't you now? You'd better cry '*Peccavi.*'"

Then, in the deathly silence of the room, the moral force of his position, and the collapse as it

seemed of his opponent, awakening a faint compunction, he took a turn over the Turkey carpet to readjust his mind.

"You're an old man, and I don't want to be too hard on you. I'm only showing you that you can't play fast and loose as if you were God Almighty any longer. You've had your own way too many years. And now you can't have it, see!" Then, as the old man again moved forward in his chair, he added: "Now, don't get into a passion again; calm yourself, because I warn you—this is your last chance. I'm a man of my word; and what I say, I do."

By a violent and unsuspected effort the old man jerked himself up and reached the bell. Mr. Ventnor heard it ring, and said sharply:

"Mind you, it's nothing to me which you do. I came for your own good. Please yourself. Well?"

He was answered by the click of the door and the old man's husky voice:

"Show this hound out! And then come back!"

Mr. Ventnor had presence of mind enough not to shake his fist. Muttering: "Very well, Mr. Heythorp! Ah! *Very* well!" he moved with dignity to the door. The careful shepherding of the servant renewed the fire of his anger. Hound! He had been called a hound!

3 §

After seeing Mr. Ventnor off the premises the man Meller returned to his master, whose face looked very odd—"all patchy-like," as he put it in the servants' hall, as though the blood driven to his head had mottled for good the snowy whiteness of the forehead. He received the unexpected order:

"Get me a hot bath ready, and put some pine stuff in it."

When the old man was seated there, the valet asked:

"How long shall I give you, sir?"

"Twenty minutes."

"Very good, sir."

Lying in that steaming brown fragrant liquid, old Heythorp heaved a stertorous sigh. By losing his temper with that ill-conditioned cur he had cooked his goose. It was done to a turn; and he was a ruined man. If only—oh! if only he could have seized the fellow by the neck and pitched him out of the room! To have lived to be so spoken to; to have been unable to lift hand or foot, hardly even his voice—he would sooner have been dead! Yes—sooner have been dead! A dumb and measureless commotion was still at work in the recesses of that thick old body, silver-

brown in the dark water, whose steam he drew deep into his wheezing lungs, as though for spiritual relief. To be beaten by a cur like that! To have that common cad of a pettifogging lawyer drag him down and kick him about; tumble a name which had stood high, in the dust! The fellow had the power to make him a byword and a beggar! It was incredible! But it was a fact. And to-morrow he would begin to do it—perhaps had begun already. His tree had come down with a crash! Eighty years—eighty good years! He regretted none of them—regretted nothing; least of all this breach of trust which had provided for his grandchildren—one of the best things he had ever done. The fellow was a cowardly hound, too! The way he had snatched the bell-pull out of his reach—despicable cur! And a chap like that was to put "paid" to the account of Sylvanus Heythorp, to "scratch" him out of life—so near the end of everything, the very end! His hand raised above the surface fell back on his stomach through the dark water, and a bubble or two rose. Not so fast—not so fast! He had but to slip down a foot, let the water close over his head, and "Good-bye" to Master Ventnor's triumph! Dead men could not be kicked off the Boards of Companies. Dead men could not be beggared, deprived of their independence. He smiled and

stirred a little in the bath till the water reached the white hairs on his lower lip. It smelt nice! And he took a long sniff. He had had a good life, a good life! And with the thought that he had it in his power at any moment to put Master Ventnor's nose out of joint—to beat the beggar after all, a sense of assuagement and well-being crept over him. His blood ran more evenly again. He closed his eyes. They talked about an after-life—people like that holy woman. Gammon! You went to sleep—a long sleep; no dreams. A nap after dinner! Dinner! His tongue sought his palate! Yes! he could eat a good dinner! That dog hadn't put him off his stroke! The best dinner he had ever eaten was the one he gave to Jack Herring, Chichester, Thornworthy, Nick Treffry and Jolyon Forsyte at Pole's. Good Lord! In 'sixty—yes—'sixty-five? Just before he fell in love with Alice Larne—ten years before he came to Liverpool. That *was* a dinner! Cost twenty-four pounds for the six of them—and Forsyte an absurdly moderate fellow. Only Nick Treffry and himself had been three-bottle men! Dead! Every jack man of them. And suddenly he thought: 'My name's a good one—I was never down before—never beaten!'

A voice above the steam said:

"The twenty minutes is up, sir."

"All right; I'll get out. Evening clothes."

And Meller, taking out dress suit and shirt, thought: 'Now, what does the old bloomer want dressin' up again for; why can't he go to bed and have his dinner there? When a man's like a baby, the cradle's the place for him.' . . .

An hour later, at the scene of his encounter with Mr. Ventnor, where the table was already laid for dinner, old Heythorp stood and gazed. The curtains had been drawn back, the window thrown open to air the room, and he could see out there the shapes of the dark trees and a sky grape-coloured, in the mild, moist night. It smelt good. A sensuous feeling stirred in him, warm from his bath, clothed from head to foot in fresh garments. Deuce of a time since he had dined in full fig! He would have liked a woman dining opposite—but not the holy woman; no, by George!—would have liked to see light falling on a woman's shoulders once again, and a pair of bright eyes! He crossed, snail-like, towards the fire. There that bullying fellow had stood with his back to it—confound his impudence!—as if the place belonged to him. And suddenly he had a vision of his three secretaries' faces—especially young Farney's—as they would look, when the pack got him by the throat and pulled him down. His co-directors, too! Old Heythorp!

How are the mighty fallen! And that hound jubilant!

His valet passed across the room to shut the window and draw the curtains. This chap too! The day he could no longer pay his wages, and had lost the power to say "Shan't want your services any more"—when he could no longer even pay his doctor for doing his best to kill him off! Power, interest, independence, all—gone! To be dressed and undressed, given pap, like a baby in arms, served as they chose to serve him, and wished out of the way—broken, dishonoured! By money alone an old man had his being! Meat, drink, movement, breath! When all his money was gone the holy woman would let him know it fast enough. They would all let him know it; or if they didn't, it would be out of pity! He had never been pitied yet—thank God! And he said:

"Get me up a bottle of Perrier Jouet. What's the menu?"

"Germane soup, sir; filly de sole; sweetbread; cutlet soubees, rum souffly."

"Tell her to give me a *hors d'œuvre*, and put on a savoury."

"Yes, sir."

When the man had gone, he thought: 'I should have liked an oyster—too late now!' and going over to his bureau, he fumblingly pulled out the

top drawer. There was little in it—just a few papers, business papers on his Companies, and a schedule of his debts; not even a copy of his will —he had not made one, nothing to leave! Letters he had never kept. Half a dozen bills, a few receipts, and the little pink note with the blue forget-me-not. That was the lot! An old tree gives up bearing leaves, and its roots dry up, before it comes down in a wind; an old man's world slowly falls away from him till he stands alone in the night. Looking at the pink note, he thought: 'Suppose I'd married Alice—a man never had a better mistress!' He fumbled the drawer to; but still he strayed feebly about the room, with a curious shrinking from sitting down, legacy from the quarter of an hour he had been compelled to sit while that hound worried at his throat. He was opposite one of the pictures now. It gleamed, dark and oily, limning a Scots Grey who had mounted a wounded Russian on his horse, and was bringing him back prisoner from the Balaclava charge. A very old friend—bought in 'fifty-nine. It had hung in his chambers in the albany—hung with him ever since. With whom would it hang when he was gone? For that holy woman would scrap it, to a certainty, and stick up some Crucifixion or other, some new-fangled high art thing! She could even do that now if she liked

—for she owned it, owned every mortal stick in the room, to the very glass he would drink his champagne from; all made over under the settlement fifteen years ago, before his last big gamble went wrong. "*De l'audace, toujours de l'audace!*" The gamble which had brought him down till his throat at last was at the mercy of a bullying hound. The pitcher and the well! At the mercy ——! The sound of a popping cork dragged him from reverie. He moved to his seat, back to the window, and sat down to his dinner. By George! They had got him an oyster! And he said:

"I've forgotten my teeth!"

While the man was gone for them, he swallowed the oysters, methodically touching them one by one with cayenne, Chili vinegar, and lemon. Ummm! Not quite what they used to be at Pimm's in the best days, but not bad—not bad! Then seeing the little blue bowl lying before him, he looked up and said:

"My compliments to cook on the oysters. Give me the champagne." And he lifted his trembling teeth. Thank God, he could still put 'em in for himself! The creaming goldenish fluid from the napkined bottle slowly reached the brim of his glass, which had a hollow stem; raising it to his lips, very red between the white hairs above and below, he drank with a gurgling noise,

and put the glass down—empty. Nectar! And just cold enough!

"I frapped it the least bit, sir."

"Quite right. What's that smell of flowers?"

"It's from those 'yacinths on the sideboard, sir. They come from Mrs. Larne, this afternoon."

"Put 'em on the table. Where's my daughter?"

"She's had dinner, sir; goin' to a ball, I think."

"A ball!"

"Charity ball, I fancy, sir."

"Ummm! Give me a touch of the old sherry with the soup."

"Yes, sir. I shall have to open a bottle."

"Very well, then, do!"

On his way to the cellar the man confided to Molly, who was carrying the soup:

"The Gov'nor's going it to-night! What he'll be like to-morrow I dunno."

The girl answered softly:

"Poor old man, let um have his pleasure." And, in the hall, with the soup tureen against her bosom, she hummed above the steam, and thought of the ribbons on her new chemises, bought out of the sovereign he had given her.

And old Heythorp, digesting his osyters, snuffed the scent of the hyacinths, and thought of the St. Germain, his favourite soup. It would-

n't be first-rate, at this time of year—should be made with little young home-grown peas. Paris was the place for it. Ah! The French were the fellows for eating, and—looking things in the face! Not hypocrites—not ashamed of their reason or their senses!

The soup came in. He sipped it, bending forward as far as he could, his napkin tucked in over his shirt-front like a bib. He got the bouquet of that sherry to a T—his sense of smell was very keen to-night; rare old stuff it was—more than a year since he had tasted it—but no one drank sherry nowadays, hadn't the constitution for it! The fish came up, and went down; and with the sweetbread he took his second glass of champagne. Always the best, that second glass—the stomach well warmed, and the palate not yet dulled. Umm! So that fellow thought he had him beaten, did he? And he said suddenly:

"The fur coat in the wardrobe, I've no use for it. You can take it away to-night."

With tempered gratitude the valet answered:

"Thank you, sir; much obliged, I'm sure." So the old buffer had found out there was moth in it!

"Have I worried you much?"

"No, sir; not at all, sir—that is, no more than reason."

"Afraid I have. Very sorry—can't help it. You'll find that, when you get like me."

"Yes, sir; I've always admired your pluck, sir."

"Um! Very good of you to say so."

"Always think of you keepin' the flag flying', sir."

Old Heythorp bent his body from the waist.

"Much obliged to you."

"Not at all, sir. Cook's done a little spinach in cream with the soubees."

"Ah! Tell her from me it's a capital dinner, so far."

"Thank you, sir."

Alone again, old Heythorp sat unmoving, his brain just narcotically touched. "The flag flyin' —the flag flyin'!" He raised his glass and sucked. He had an appetite now, and finished the three cutlets, and all the sauce and spinach. Pity! he could have managed a snipe—fresh shot! A desire to delay, to lengthen dinner, was strong upon him; there were but the *soufflé* and the savoury to come. He would have enjoyed, too, someone to talk to. He had always been fond of good company—been good company himself, or so they said—not that he had had a chance of late. Even at the Boards they avoided talking to him, he had noticed for a long time. Well! that would-

n't trouble him again—he had sat through his last Board, no doubt. They shouldn't kick him off, though; he wouldn't give them that pleasure —had seen the beggars hankering after his chairman's shoes too long. The *soufflé* was before him now, and lifting his glass, he said:

"Fill up."

"These are the special glasses, sir; only four to the bottle."

"Fill up."

The servant filled, screwing up his mouth.

Old Heythorp drank, and put the glass down empty with a sigh. He had been faithful to his principles, finished the bottle before touching the sweet—a good bottle—of a good brand! And now for the *soufflé!* Delicious, flipped down with the old sherry! So that holy woman was going to a ball, was she! How deuced funny! Who would dance with a dry stick like that, all eaten up with a piety which was just sexual disappointment? Ah! yes, lots of women like that—had often noticed 'em—pitied 'em too, until you had to do with them and they made you as unhappy as themselves, and were tyrants into the bargain. And he asked:

"What's the savoury?"

"Cheese remmykin, sir."

His favourite.

"I'll have my port with it—the 'sixty-eight."

The man stood gazing with evident stupefaction. He had not expected this. The old man's face was very flushed, but that might be the bath. He said feebly:

"Are you sure you ought, sir?"

"No, but I'm going to."

"Would you mind if I spoke to Miss Heythorp, sir?"

"If you do, you can leave my service."

"Well, sir, I don't accept the responsibility."

"Who asked you to?"

"No, sir."

"Well, get it, then; and don't be an ass."

"Yes, sir." If the old man were not humoured he would have a fit, perhaps!

And the old man sat quietly staring at the hyacinths. He felt happy, his whole being lined and warmed and drowsed—and there was more to come! What had the holy folk to give you compared with the comfort of a good dinner? Could they make you dream, and see life rosy for a little? No, they could only give you promissory notes which never would be cashed. A man had nothing but his pluck—they only tried to undermine it, and make him squeal for help. He could see his precious doctor throwing up his hands: "Port after a bottle of champagne—you'll die

of it!" And a very good death too—none better. A sound broke the silence of the closed-up room. Music? His daughter playing the piano overhead. Singing too! What a trickle of a voice! Jenny Lind! The Swedish nightingale—he had never missed the nights when she was singing—Jenny Lind!

"It's very hot, sir. Shall I take it out of the case?"

Ah! The ramequin!

"Touch of butter, and the cayenne!"

"Yes, sir."

He ate it slowly, savouring each mouthful; had never tasted a better. With cheese—port! He drank one glass, and said:

"Help me to my chair."

And settled there before the fire with decanter and glass and hand-bell on the little low table by his side, he murmured:

"Bring coffee, and my cigar, in twenty minutes."

To-night he would do justice to his wine, not smoking till he had finished. As old Horace said:

> "Aequam memento rebus in arduis
> Servare mentem."

And, raising his glass, he sipped slowly, spilling a drop or two, shutting his eyes.

The faint silvery squealing of the holy woman in the room above, the scent of hyacinths, the drowse of the fire, on which a cedar log had just been laid, the feeling of the port soaking down into the crannies of his being, made up a momentary Paradise. Then the music stopped; and no sound rose but the tiny groans of the log trying to resist the fire. Dreamily he thought: 'Life wears you out—wears you out. Logs on a fire!' And he filled his glass again. That fellow had been careless; there were dregs at the bottom of the decanter and he had got down to them! Then, as the last drop from his tilted glass trickled into the white hairs on his chin, he heard the coffee tray put down, and taking his cigar he put it to his ear, rolling it in his thick fingers. In prime condition! And drawing a first whiff, he said:

"Open that bottle of the old brandy in the sideboard."

"Brandy, sir? I really daren't, sir."

"Are you my servant or not?"

"Yes, sir, but——"

A minute of silence, then the man went hastily to the sideboard, took out the bottle, and drew the cork. The tide of crimson in the old man's face had frightened him.

"Leave it there."

The unfortunate valet placed the bottle on the little table. 'I'll have to tell her,' he thought; 'but if I take away the port decanter and the glass, it won't look so bad.' And, carrying them, he left the room.

Slowly the old man drank his coffee, and the liqueur of brandy. The whole gamut! And watching his cigar-smoke wreathing blue in the orange glow, he smiled. The last night to call his soul his own, the last night of his independence. Send in his resignations to-morrow—not wait to be kicked off! Not give that fellow a chance!

A voice which seemed to come from far off, said:

"Father! You're drinking brandy! How *can* you—you know it's simple poison to you!" A figure in white, scarcely actual, loomed up close. He took the bottle to fill up his liqueur glass, in defiance; but a hand in a long white glove, with another dangling from its wrist, pulled it away, shook it at him, and replaced it in the sideboard. And, just as when Mr. Ventnor stood there accusing him, a swelling and churning in his throat prevented him from speech; his lips moved, but only a little froth came forth.

His daughter had approached again. She stood quite close, in white satin, thin-faced, sallow, with eyebrows raised, and her dark hair frizzed—

yes! frizzed—the holy woman! With all his might he tried to say: 'So you bully me, do you—you bully me *to-night!*' but only the word "so" and a sort of whispering came forth. He heard her speaking. "It's no good your getting angry, Father. After champagne—it's wicked!" Then her form receded in a sort of rustling white mist; she was gone; and he heard the sputtering and growling of her taxi, bearing her to the ball. So! She tyrannised and bullied, even before she had him at her mercy, did she? She should see! Anger had brightened his eyes; the room came clear again. And slowly raising himself he sounded the bell twice, for the girl, not for that fellow Meller, who was in the plot. As soon as her pretty black and white-aproned figure stood before him, he said:

"Help me up!"

Twice her soft pulling was not enough, and he sank back. The third time he struggled to his feet.

"Thank you; that'll do." Then, waiting till she was gone, he crossed the room, fumbled open the sideboard door, and took out the bottle. Reaching over the polished oak, he grasped a sherry glass; and holding the bottle with both hands, tipped the liquor into it, put it to his lips and sucked. Drop by drop it passed over his palate—

mild, very old, old as himself, coloured like sunlight, fragrant. To the last drop he drank it, then hugging the bottle to his shirt-front, he moved snail-like to his chair, and fell back into its depths. For some minutes he remained there motionless, the bottle clasped to his chest, thinking: 'This is not the attitude of a gentleman. I must put it down on the table—on the table;' but a thick cloud was between him and everything. It was with his hands he would have to put the bottle on the table! But he could not find his hands, could not feel them. His mind see-sawed in strophe and antistrophe: "You can't move!" —"I will move!" "You're beaten"—"I'm not beat." "Give up"—"I won't." That struggle to find his hands seemed to last for ever—he *must* find them! After that—go down—all standing—after that! Everything round him was red. Then the red cloud cleared just a little, and he could hear the clock—"tick—tick—tick"; a faint sensation spread from his shoulders down to his wrists, down his palms; and yes—he could feel the bottle! He redoubled his struggle to get forward in his chair; to get forward and put the bottle down. It was not dignified like this! One arm he could move now; but he could not grip the bottle nearly tight enough to put it down. Working his whole body forward, inch by inch,

he shifted himself up in the chair till he could lean sideways, and the bottle, slipping down his chest, dropped slanting to the edge of the low stool-table. Then with all his might he screwed his trunk and arms an inch further, and the bottle stood. He had done it—done it! His lips twitched into a smile; his body sagged back to its old position. He had done it! And he closed his eyes. . . .

At half-past eleven the girl Molly, opening the door, looked at him and said softly: "Sirr! there's some ladies, and a gentleman!" But he did not answer. And, still holding the door, she whispered out into the hall:

"He's asleep, miss."

A voice whispered back:

"Oh! Just let me go in, I won't wake him unless he does. But I do want to show him my dress."

The girl moved aside; and on tiptoe Phyllis passed in. She walked to where, between the lamp-glow and the fire-glow, she was lighted up. White satin—her first low-cut dress—the flush of her first supper party—a gardenia at her breast, another in her fingers! Oh! what a pity he was asleep! How red he looked! How funnily old men breathed! And mysteriously, as a child might, she whispered:

"Guardy!"

No answer! And pouting, she stood twiddling the gardenia. Then suddenly she thought: 'I'll put it in his buttonhole! When he wakes up and sees it, how he'll jump!'

And stealing close, she bent and slipped it in. Two faces looked at her from round the door; she heard Bob Pillin's smothered chuckle; her mother's rich and feathery laugh. Oh! How red his forehead was! She touched it with her lips; skipped back, twirled round, danced silently a second, blew a kiss, and like quicksilver was gone.

And the whispering, the chuckling, and one little outpealing laugh rose in the hall.

But the old man slept. Nor until Meller came at his usual hour of half-past twelve, was it known that he would never wake.

1916.

THE APPLE TREE

"The Apple-tree, the singing and the gold."
MURRAY'S "HIPPOLYTUS OF EURIPIDES."

ON their silver-wedding day Ashurst and his wife were motoring along the outskirts of the moor, intending to crown the festival by stopping the night at Torquay, where they had first met. This was the idea of Stella Ashurst, whose character contained a streak of sentiment. If she had long lost the blue-eyed, flower-like charm, the cool slim purity of face and form, the apple-blossom colouring, which had so swiftly and so oddly affected Ashurst twenty-six years ago, she was still at forty-three a comely and faithful companion, whose cheeks were faintly mottled, and whose grey-blue eyes had acquired a certain fullness.

It was she who had stopped the car where the common rose steeply to the left, and a narrow strip of larch and beech, with here and there a pine, stretched out towards the valley between the road and the first long high hill of the full moor. She was looking for a place where they might lunch, for Ashurst never looked for any-

thing; and this, between the golden furze and the feathery green larches smelling of lemons in the last sun of April—this, with a view into the deep valley and up to the long moor heights, seemed fitting to the decisive nature of one who sketched in water-colours, and loved romantic spots. Grasping her paint box, she got out.

"Won't this do, Frank?"

Ashurst, rather like a bearded Schiller, grey in the wings, tall, long-legged, with large remote grey eyes which sometimes filled with meaning and became almost beautiful, with nose a little to one side, and bearded lips just open—Ashurst, forty-eight, and silent, grasped the luncheon basket, and got out too.

"Oh! Look, Frank! A grave!"

By the side of the road, where the track from the top of the common crossed it at right angles and ran through a gate past the narrow wood, was a thin mound of turf, six feet by one, with a moorstone to the west, and on it someone had thrown a blackthorn spray and a handful of bluebells. Ashurst looked, and the poet in him moved. At cross-roads—a suicide's grave! Poor mortals with their superstitions! Whoever lay there, though, had the best of it, no clammy sepulchre among other hideous graves carved with futilities—just a rough stone, the wide sky, and way-

side blessings! And, without comment, for he had learned not to be a philosopher in the bosom of his family, he strode away up on to the common, dropped the luncheon basket under a wall, spread a rug for his wife to sit on—she would turn up from her sketching when she was hungry—and took from his pocket Murray's translation of the "Hippolytus." He had soon finished reading of "The Cyprian" and her revenge, and looked at the sky instead. And watching the white clouds so bright against the intense blue, Ashurst, on his silver-wedding day, longed for—he knew not what. Mal-adjusted to life—man's organism! One's mode of life might be high and scrupulous, but there was always an undercurrent of greediness, a hankering, and sense of waste. Did women have it too? Who could tell? And yet, men who gave vent to their appetites for novelty, their riotous longings for new adventures, new risks, new pleasures, these suffered, no doubt, from the reverse side of starvation, from surfeit. No getting out of it—a mal-adjusted animal, civilised man! There could be no garden of his choosing, of "the Apple-tree, the singing, and the gold," in the words of that lovely Greek chorus, no achievable elysium in life, or lasting haven of happiness for any man with a sense of beauty—nothing which could compare with the captured loveli-

ness in a work of art, set down for ever, so that to look on it or read was always to have the same precious sense of exaltation and restful inebriety. Life no doubt had moments with that quality of beauty, of unbidden flying rapture, but the trouble was, they lasted no longer than the span of a cloud's flight over the sun; impossible to keep them with you, as Art caught beauty and held it fast. They were fleeting as one of the glimmering or golden visions one had of the soul in nature, glimpses of its remote and brooding spirit. Here, with the sun hot on his face, a cuckoo calling from a thorn tree, and in the air the honey savour of gorse—here among the little fronds of the young fern, the starry blackthorn, while the bright clouds drifted by high above the hills and dreamy valleys—here and now was such a glimpse. But in a moment it would pass—as the face of Pan, which looks round the corner of a rock, vanishes at your stare. And suddenly he sat up. Surely there was something familiar about this view, this bit of common, that ribbon of road, the old wall behind him. While they were driving he had not been taking notice—never did; thinking of far things or of nothing—but now he saw! Twenty-six years ago, just at this time of year, from the farmhouse within half a mile of this very spot he had started for that day

in Torquay whence it might be said he had never returned. And a sudden ache beset his heart; he had stumbled on just one of those past moments in his life, whose beauty and rapture he had failed to arrest, whose wings had fluttered away into the unknown; he had stumbled on a buried memory, a wild sweet time, swiftly choked and ended. And, turning on his face, he rested his chin on his hands, and stared at the short grass where the little blue milkwort was growing. . . .

And this is what he remembered.

I §

On the first of May, after their last year together at college, Frank Ashurst and his friend Robert Garton were on a tramp. They had walked that day from Brent, intending to make Chagford, but Ashurst's football knee had given out, and according to their map they had still some seven miles to go. They were sitting on a bank beside the road, where a track crossed alongside a wood, resting the knee and talking of the universe, as young men will. Both were over six feet, and thin as rails; Ashurst pale, idealistic, full of absence; Garton queer, round-the-corner, knotted, curly, like some primeval beast. Both had a literary bent; neither wore a hat.

Ashurst's hair was smooth, pale, wavy, and had a way of rising on either side of his brow, as if always being flung back; Garton's was a kind of dark unfathomed mop. They had not met a soul for miles.

"My dear fellow," Garton was saying, "pity's only an effect of self-consciousness; it's a disease of the last five thousand years. The world was happier without."

Ashurst, following the clouds with his eyes, answered:

"It's the pearl in the oyster, anyway."

"My dear chap, all our modern unhappiness comes from pity. Look at animals, and Red Indians, limited to feeling their own occasional misfortunes; then look at ourselves—never free from feeling the toothaches of others. Let's get back to feeling for nobody, and have a better time."

"You'll never practise that."

Garton pensively stirred the hotch-potch of his hair.

"To attain full growth, one mustn't be squeamish. To starve oneself emotionally's a mistake. All emotion is to the good—enriches life."

"Yes, and when it runs up against chivalry?"

"Ah! That's so English! If you speak of emotion the English always think you want something physical, and are shocked. They're afraid

of passion, but not of lust—oh, no!—so long as they can keep it secret."

Ashurst did not answer; he had plucked a blue floweret, and was twiddling it against the sky. A cuckoo began calling from a thorn tree. The sky, the flowers, the songs of birds! Robert was talking through his hat! And he said:

"Well, let's go on, and find some farm where we can put up." In uttering those words, he was conscious of a girl coming down from the common just above them. She was outlined against the sky, carrying a basket, and you could see that sky through the crook of her arm. And Ashurst, who saw beauty without wondering how it could advantage him, thought: 'How pretty!' The wind, blowing her dark frieze skirt against her legs, lifted her battered peacock tam-o'-shanter; her greyish blouse was worn and old, her shoes were split, her little hands rough and red, her neck browned. Her dark hair waved untidy across her broad forehead, her face was short, her upper lip short, showing a glint of teeth, her brows were straight and dark, her lashes long and dark, her nose straight; but her grey eyes were the wonder—dewy as if opened for the first time that day. She looked at Ashurst—perhaps he struck her as strange, limping along without a hat, with his large eyes on her, and his

hair flung back. He could not take off what was not on his head, but put up his hand in a salute, and said:

"Can you tell us if there's a farm near here where we could stay the night? I've gone lame."

"There's only our farm near, sir." She spoke without shyness, in a pretty soft crisp voice.

"And where is that?"

"Down here, sir."

"Would you put us up?"

"Oh! I think we would."

"Will you show us the way?"

"Yes, sir."

He limped on, silent, and Garton took up the catechism.

"Are you a Devonshire girl?"

"No, sir."

"What then?"

"From Wales."

"Ah! I *thought* you were a Celt; so it's not your farm?"

"My aunt's, sir."

"And your uncle's?"

"He is dead."

"Who farms it, then?"

"My aunt, and my three cousins."

"But your uncle was a Devonshire man?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you lived here long?"

"Seven years."

"And how d'you like it after Wales?"

"I don't know, sir."

"I suppose you don't remember?"

"Oh, yes! But it is different."

"I believe you!"

Ashurst broke in suddenly:

"How old are you?"

"Seventeen, sir."

"And what's your name?"

"Megan David."

"This is Robert Garton, and I am Frank Ashurst. We wanted to get on to Chagford."

"It is a pity your leg is hurting you."

Ashurst smiled, and when he smiled his face was rather beautiful.

Descending past the narrow wood, they came on the farm suddenly—a long, low, stone-built dwelling with casement windows, in a farmyard where pigs and fowls and an old mare were straying. A short steep-up grass hill behind was crowned with a few Scotch firs, and in front, an old orchard of apple trees, just breaking into flower, stretched down to a stream and a long wild meadow. A little boy with oblique dark eyes was shepherding a pig, and by the house door

stood a woman, who came towards them. The girl said:

"It is Mrs. Narracombe, my aunt."

"Mrs. Narracombe, my aunt," had a quick, dark eye, like a mother wild-duck's, and something of the same snaky turn about her neck.

"We met your niece on the road," said Ashurst; "she thought you might perhaps put us up for the night."

Mrs. Narracombe, taking them in from head to heel, answered:

"Well, I can, if you don't mind one room. Megan, get the spare room ready, and a bowl of cream. You'll be wanting tea, I suppose."

Passing through a sort of porch made by two yew trees and some flowering-currant bushes, the girl disappeared into the house, her peacock tam-o'-shanter bright athwart that rosy-pink and the dark green of the yews.

"Will you come into the parlour and rest your leg? You'll be from college, perhaps?"

"We were, but we've gone down now."

Mrs. Narracombe nodded sagely.

The parlour, brick-floored, with bare table and shiny chairs and sofa stuffed with horsehair, seemed never to have been used, it was so terribly clean. Ashurst sat down at once on the sofa, holding his lame knee between his hands, and Mrs.

Narracombe gazed at him. He was the only son of a late professor of chemistry, but people found a certain lordliness in one who was often so sublimely unconscious of them.

"Is there a stream where we could bathe?"

"There's the strame at the bottom of the orchard, but sittin' down you'll not be covered!"

"How deep?"

"Well, 'tis about a foot and a half, maybe."

"Oh! That'll do fine. Which way?"

"Down the lane, through the second gate on the right, an' the pool's by the big apple tree that stands by itself. There's trout there, if you can tickle them."

"They're more likely to tickle us!"

Mrs. Narracombe smiled. "There'll be the tea ready when you come back."

The pool, formed by the damming of a rock, had a sandy bottom; and the big apple tree, lowest in the orchard, grew so close that its boughs almost overhung the water; it was in leaf, and all but in flower—its crimson buds just bursting. There was not room for more than one at a time in that narrow bath, and Ashurst waited his turn, rubbing his knee and gazing at the wild meadow, all rocks and thorn trees and field flowers, with a grove of beeches beyond, raised up on a flat mound. Every bough was swinging in the wind,

every spring bird calling, and a slanting sunlight dappled the grass. He thought of Theocritus, and the river Cherwell, of the moon, and the maiden with the dewy eyes; of so many things that he seemed to think of nothing; and he felt absurdly happy.

2 §

During a late and sumptuous tea with eggs to it, cream and jam, and thin, fresh cakes touched with saffron, Garton descanted on the Celts. It was about the period of the Celtic awakening, and the discovery that there was Celtic blood about this family had excited one who believed that he was a Celt himself. Sprawling on a horse-hair chair, with a hand-made cigarette dribbling from the corner of his curly lips, he had been plunging his cold pin-points of eyes into Ashurst's and praising the refinement of the Welsh. To come out of Wales into England was like the change from china to earthenware! Frank, as a d——d Englishman, had not of course perceived the exquisite refinement and emotional capacity of that Welsh girl! And, delicately stirring in the dark mat of his still wet hair, he explained how exactly she illustrated the writings of the Welsh bard Morgan-ap-Something in the twelfth century.

Ashurst, full length on the horsehair sofa, and jutting far beyond its end, smoked a deeply-coloured pipe, and did not listen, thinking of the girl's face when she brought in a relay of cakes. It had been exactly like looking at a flower, or some other pretty sight in Nature—till, with a funny little shiver, she had lowered her glance and gone out, quiet as a mouse.

"Let's go to the kitchen," said Garton, "and see some more of her."

The kitchen was a white-washed room with rafters, to which were attached smoked hams; there were flower-pots on the window-sill, and guns hanging on nails, queer mugs, china and pewter, and portraits of Queen Victoria. A long, narrow table of plain wood was set with bowls and spoons, under a string of high-hung onions; two sheep-dogs and three cats lay here and there. On one side of the recessed fireplace sat two small boys, idle, and good as gold; on the other sat a stout, light-eyed, red-faced youth with hair and lashes the colour of the tow he was running through the barrel of a gun; between them Mrs. Narracombe dreamily stirred some savoury-scented stew in a large pot. Two other youths, oblique-eyed, dark-haired, rather sly-faced, like the two little boys, were talking together and lolling against the wall; and a short, elderly,

clean-shaven man in corduroys, seated in the window, was conning a battered journal. The girl Megan seemed the only active creature—drawing cider and passing with the jugs from cask to table. Seeing them thus about to eat, Garton said:

"Ah! If you'll let us, we'll come back when supper's over," and without waiting for an answer they withdrew again to the parlour. But the colour in the kitchen, the warmth, the scents, and all those faces, heightened the bleakness of their shiny room, and they resumed their seats moodily.

"Regular gipsy type, those boys. There was only one Saxon—the fellow cleaning the gun. That girl is a very subtle study psychologically."

Ashurst's lips twitched. Garton seemed to him an ass just then. Subtle study! She was a wild flower. A creature it did you good to look at. Study!

Garton went on:

"Emotionally she would be wonderful. She wants awakening."

"Are you going to awaken her?"

Garton looked at him and smiled. 'How coarse and English you are!' that curly smile seemed saying.

And Ashurst puffed his pipe. Awaken her! This

fool had the best opinion of himself! He threw up the window and leaned out. Dusk had gathered thick. The farm buildings and the wheel-house were all dim and bluish, the apple trees but a blurred wilderness; the air smelled of wood-smoke from the kitchen fire. One bird going to bed later than the others was uttering a half-hearted twitter, as though surprised at the darkness. From the stable came the snuffle and stamp of a feeding horse. And away over there was the loom of the moor, and away and away the shy stars which had not as yet full light, pricking white through the deep blue heavens. A quavering owl hooted. Ashurst drew a deep breath. What a night to wander out in! A padding of unshod hoofs came up the lane, and three dim, dark shapes passed—ponies on an evening march. Their heads, black and fuzzy, showed above the gate. At the tap of his pipe, and a shower of little sparks, they shied round and scampered. A bat went fluttering past, uttering its almost inaudible "chip, chip." Ashurst held out his hand; on the upturned palm he could feel the dew. Suddenly from overhead he heard little burring boys' voices, little thumps of boots thrown down, and another voice, crisp and soft—the girl's putting them to bed, no doubt; and nine clear words: "No, Rick, you can't have the cat in bed"; then

came a skirmish of giggles and gurgles, a soft slap, a laugh so low and pretty that it made him shiver a little. A blowing sound, and the glim of the candle which was fingering the dusk above, went out; silence reigned. Ashurst withdrew into the room and sat down; his knee pained him, and his soul felt gloomy.

"You go to the kitchen," he said; "I'm going to bed."

3 §

For Ashurst the wheel of slumber was wont to turn noiseless and slick and swift, but though he seemed sunk in sleep when his companion came up, he was really wide awake; and long after Garton, smothered in the other bed of that low-roofed room, was worshipping darkness with his upturned nose, he heard the owls. Barring the discomfort of his knee, it was not unpleasant—the cares of life did not loom large in night watches for this young man. In fact he had none; just enrolled a barrister, with literary aspirations, the world before him, no father or mother, and four hundred a year of his own. Did it matter where he went, what he did, or when he did it? His bed, too, was hard, and this preserved him from fever. He lay, sniffing the scent of the night which drifted into the low room through the open

casement close to his head. Except for a definite irritation with his friend, natural when you have tramped with a man for three days, Ashurst's memories and visions that sleepless night were kindly and wistful and exciting. One vision, specially clear and unreasonable, for he had not even been conscious of noting it, was the face of the youth cleaning the gun; its intent, stolid, yet startled uplook at the kitchen doorway, quickly shifted to the girl carrying the cider jug. This red, blue-eyed, light-lashed, tow-haired face stuck as firmly in his memory as the girl's own face, so dewy and simple. But at last, in the square of darkness through the uncurtained casement, he saw day coming, and heard one hoarse and sleepy caw. Then followed silence, dead as ever, till the song of a blackbird, not properly awake, adventured into the hush. And, from staring at the framed brightening light, Ashurst fell asleep.

Next day his knee was badly swollen; the walking tour was obviously over. Garton, due back in London on the morrow, departed at midday with an ironical smile which left a scar of irritation—healed the moment his loping figure vanished round the corner of the steep lane. All day Ashurst rested his knee, in a green-painted wooden chair on the patch of grass by the yew-tree porch, where the sunlight distilled the scent of stocks

and gillyflowers, and a ghost of scent from the flowering-currant bushes. Beatifically he smoked, dreamed, watched.

A farm in spring is all birth—young things coming out of bud and shell, and human beings watching over the process with faint excitement feeding and tending what has been born. So still the young man sat, that a mother-goose, with stately cross-footed waddle, brought her six yellow-necked grey-backed goslings to strop their little beaks against the grass blades at his feet. Now and again Mrs. Narracombe or the girl Megan would come and ask if he wanted anything, and he would smile and say: "Nothing, thanks. It's splendid here." Towards tea-time they came out together, bearing a long poultice of some dark stuff in a bowl, and after a long and solemn scrutiny of his swollen knee, bound it on. When they were gone, he thought of the girl's soft "Oh!"—of her pitying eyes, and the little wrinkle in her brow. And again he felt that unreasoning irritation against his departed friend, who had talked such rot about her. When she brought out his tea, he said:

"How did you like my friend, Megan?"

She forced down her upper lip, as if afraid that to smile was not polite. "He was a funny gentleman; he made us laugh. I think he is very clever."

"What did he say to make you laugh?"

"He said I was a daughter of the bards. What are they?"

"Welsh poets, who lived hundreds of years ago."

"Why am I their daughter, please?"

"He meant that you were the sort of girl they sang about."

She wrinkled her brows. "I think he likes to joke. Am I?"

"Would you believe me, if I told you?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, I think he was right."

She smiled.

And Ashurst thought: 'You *are* a pretty thing!'

"He said, too, that Joe was a Saxon type. What would that be?"

"Which is Joe? With the blue eyes and red face?"

"Yes. My uncle's nephew."

"Not your cousin, then?"

"No."

"Well, he meant that Joe was like the men who came over to England about fourteen hundred years ago, and conquered it."

"Oh! I know about them; but is he?"

"Garton's crazy about that sort of thing;

but I must say Joe does look a bit Early Saxon."

"Yes."

That "Yes" tickled Ashurst. It was so crisp and graceful, so conclusive, and politely acquiescent in what was evidently Greek to her.

"He said that all the other boys were regular gipsies. He should not have said that. My aunt laughed, but she didn't like it, of course, and my cousins were angry. Uncle was a farmer—farmers are not gipsies. It is wrong to hurt people."

Ashurst wanted to take her hand and give it a squeeze, but he only answered:

"Quite right, Megan. By the way, I heard you putting the little ones to bed last night."

She flushed a little. "Please to drink your tea—it is getting cold. Shall I get you some fresh?"

"Do you ever have time to do anything for yourself?"

"Oh! Yes."

"I've been watching, but I haven't seen it yet."

She wrinkled her brows in a puzzled frown, and her colour deepened.

When she was gone, Ashurst thought: 'Did she think I was chaffing her? I wouldn't for the world!' He was at that age when to some men "Beauty's a flower," as the poet says, and in-

spires in them the thoughts of chivalry. Never very conscious of his surroundings, it was some time before he was aware that the youth whom Garton had called "a Saxon type" was standing outside the stable door; and a fine bit of colour he made in his soiled brown velvet-cords, muddy gaiters, and blue shirt; red-armed, red-faced, the sun turning his hair from tow to flax; immovably stolid, persistent, unsmiling he stood. Then, seeing Ashurst looking at him, he crossed the yard at that gait of the young countryman always ashamed not to be slow and heavy-dwelling on each leg, and disappeared round the end of the house towards the kitchen entrance. A chill came over Ashurst's mood. Clods? With all the good will in the world, how impossible to get on terms with them! And yet—see that girl! Her shoes were split, her hands rough; but—what was it? Was it really her Celtic blood, as Garton had said?—she was a lady born, a jewel, though probably she could do no more than just read and write!

The elderly, clean-shaven man he had seen last night in the kitchen had come into the yard with a dog, driving the cows to their milking. Ashurst saw that he was lame.

"You've got some good ones there!"

The lame man's face brightened. He had the

upward look in his eyes which prolonged suffering often brings.

"Yeas; they'm praaper buties; gude milkers tu."

"I bet they are."

"'Ope as yure leg's better, zurr."

"Thank you, it's getting on."

The lame man touched his own: "I know what 'tes, meself; 'tes a main worritin' thing, the knee. I've a—'ad mine bad this ten year."

Ashurst made the sound of sympathy which comes so readily from those who have an independent income, and the lame man smiled again.

"Mustn't complain, though—they mighty near 'ad it off."

"Ho!"

"Yeas; an' compared with what 'twas, 'tes almost so gude as nu."

"They've put a bandage of splendid stuff on mine."

"The maid she picks et. She'm a gude maid wi' the flowers. There's folks zeem to know the healin' in things. My mother was a rare one for that. 'Ope as yu'll zune be better, zurr. Goo ahn, therr!"

Ashurst smiled. "Wi' the flowers!" A flower herself!

That evening, after his supper of cold duck, junket, and cider, the girl came in.

"Please, auntie says—will you try a piece of our Mayday cake?"

"If I may come to the kitchen for it."

"Oh, yes! You'll be missing your friend."

"Not I. But are you sure no one minds?"

"Who would mind? We shall be very pleased."

Ashurst rose too suddenly for his stiff knee, staggered, and subsided. The girl gave a little gasp, and held out her hands. Ashurst took them, small, rough, brown; checked his impulse to put them to his lips, and let her pull him up. She came close beside him, offering her shoulder. And leaning on her he walked across the room. That shoulder seemed quite the pleasantest thing he had ever touched. But he had presence of mind enough to catch his stick out of the rack, and withdraw his hand before arriving at the kitchen.

That night he slept like a top, and woke with his knee of almost normal size. He again spent the morning in his chair on the grass patch, scribbling down verses; but in the afternoon he wandered about with the two little boys Nick and Rick. It was Saturday, so they were early home from school; quick, shy, dark little rascals of seven and six, soon talkative, for Ashurst had a way with children. By four o'clock they had

shown him all their methods of destroying life, except the tickling of trout; and with breeches tucked up, lay on their stomachs over the trout stream, pretending they had this accomplishment also. They tickled nothing, of course, for their giggling and shouting scared every spotted thing away. Ashurst, on a rock at the edge of the beech clump, watched them, and listened to the cuckoos, till Nick, the elder and less persevering, came up and stood beside him.

"The gipsy bogle zets on that stone," he said.

"What gipsy bogle?"

"Dunno; never zeen 'e. Megan zays 'e zets there; an' old Jim zeed 'e once. 'E was zettin' there naight afore our pony kicked-in father's 'ead. 'E plays the viddle."

"What tune does he play?"

"Dunno."

"What's he like?"

"'E's black. Old Jim zays 'e's all over 'air. 'E's a praaper bogle. 'E don' come only at naight." The little boy's oblique dark eyes slid round. "D'yu think 'e might want to take me away? Megan's feared of 'e."

"Has she seen him?"

"No. She's not afeared o' yu."

"I should think not. Why should she be?"

"She zays a prayer for yu."

"How do you know that, you little rascal?"

"When I was asleep, she said: 'God bless us all, an' Mr. Ashes.' I yeard 'er whisperin'."

"You're a little ruffian to tell what you hear when you're not meant to hear it!"

The little boy was silent. Then he said aggressively:

"I can skin rabbets. Megan, she can't bear skinnin' 'em. I like blood."

"Oh! you do; you little monster!"

"What's that?"

"A creature that likes hurting others."

The little boy scowled. "They'm only dead rabbets, what us eats."

"Quite right, Nick. I beg your pardon."

"I can skin frogs, tu."

But Ashurst had become absent. "God bless us all, and Mr. Ashes!" And puzzled by that sudden inaccessibility, Nick ran back to the stream where the giggling and shouts again uprose at once.

When Megan brought his tea, he said:

"What's the gipsy bogle, Megan?"

She looked up, startled.

"He brings bad things."

"Surely you don't believe in ghosts?"

"I hope I will never see him."

"Of course you won't. There aren't such things. What old Jim saw was a pony."

"No! There are bogles in the rocks; they are the men who lived long ago."

"They aren't gipsies, anyway; those old men were dead long before gipsies came."

She said simply: "They are all bad."

"Why? If there are any, they're only wild, like the rabbits. The flowers aren't bad for being wild; the thorn trees were never planted—and you don't mind them. I shall go down at night and look for your bogle, and have a talk with him."

"Oh, no! Oh, no!"

"Oh, yes! I shall go and sit on his rock."

She clasped her hands together: "Oh, please!"

"Why! What does it matter if anything happens to me?"

She did not answer; and in a sort of pet he added:

"Well, I daresay I shan't see him, because I suppose I must be off soon."

"Soon?"

"Your aunt won't want to keep me here."

"Oh, yes! We always let lodgings in summer."

Fixing his eyes on her face, he asked:

"Would you like me to stay?"

"Yes."

"I'm going to say a prayer for *you* to-night!"

She flushed crimson, frowned, and went out of the room. He sat, cursing himself, till his tea was stewed. It was as if he had hacked with his thick boots at a clump of bluebells. Why had he said such a silly thing? Was he just a towny college ass like Robert Garton, as far from understanding this girl?

4 §

Ashurst spent the next week confirming the restoration of his leg, by exploration of the country within easy reach. Spring was a revelation to him this year. In a kind of intoxication he would watch the pink-white buds of some backward beech tree sprayed up in the sunlight against the deep blue sky, or the trunks and limbs of the few Scotch firs, tawny in violent light, or again, on the moor, the gale-bent larches which had such a look of life when the wind streamed in their young green, above the rusty black underboughs. Or he would lie on the banks, gazing at the clusters of dog-violets, or up in the dead bracken, fingering the pink, transparent buds of the dewberry, while the cuckoos called and yaffles laughed, or a lark, from very high, dripped its beads of song. It was certainly different from any spring he had ever known, for spring was within him, not without. In the daytime he hardly saw

the family; and when Megan brought in his meals she always seemed too busy in the house or among the young things in the yard to stay talking long. But in the evenings he installed himself in the window seat in the kitchen, smoking and chatting with the lame man Jim, or Mrs. Narracombe, while the girl sewed, or moved about, clearing the supper things away. And sometimes, with the sensation a cat must feel when it purrs, he would become conscious that Megan's eyes—those dew-grey eyes—were fixed on him with a sort of lingering soft look which was strangely flattering.

It was on Sunday week in the evening, when he was lying in the orchard listening to a blackbird and composing a love poem, that he heard the gate swing to, and saw the girl come running among the trees, with the red-cheeked, stolid Joe in swift pursuit. About twenty yards away the chase ended, and the two stood fronting each other, not noticing the stranger in the grass—the boy pressing on, the girl fending him off. Ashurst could see her face, angry, disturbed; and the youth's—who would have thought that red-faced yokel could look so distraught! And painfully affected by that sight, he jumped up. They saw him then. Megan dropped her hands, and shrank behind a tree-trunk; the boy gave an

angry grunt, rushed at the bank, scrambled over and vanished. Ashurst went slowly up to her. She was standing quite still, biting her lip—very pretty, with her fine, dark hair blown loose about her face, and her eyes cast down.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

She gave him one upward look, from eyes much dilated; then, catching her breath, turned away. Ashurst followed.

"Megan!"

But she went on; and taking hold of her arm, he turned her gently round to him.

"Stop and speak to me."

"Why do you beg my pardon? It is not to me you should do that."

"Well, then, to Joe."

"How dare he come after me?"

"In love with you, I suppose."

She stamped her foot.

Ashurst uttered a short laugh. "Would you like me to punch his head?"

She cried with sudden passion:

"You laugh at me—you laugh at us!"

He caught hold of her hands, but she shrank back, till her passionate little face and loose dark hair were caught among the pink clusters of the apple blossom. Ashurst raised one of her imprisoned hands and put his lips to it. He felt how

chivalrous he was, and superior to that clod Joe—just brushing that small, rough hand with his mouth! Her shrinking ceased suddenly; she seemed to tremble towards him. A sweet warmth overtook Ashurst from top to toe. This slim maiden, so simple and fine and pretty, was pleased, then, at the touch of his lips! And, yielding to a swift impulse, he put his arms round her, pressed her to him, and kissed her forehead. Then he was frightened—she went so pale, closing her eyes, so that the long, dark lashes lay on her pale cheeks; her hands, too, lay inert at her sides. The touch of her breast sent a shiver through him. "Megan!" he sighed out, and let her go. In the utter silence a blackbird shouted. Then the girl seized his hand, put it to her cheek, her heart, her lips, kissed it passionately, and fled away among the mossy trunks of the apple trees, till they hid her from him.

Ashurst sat down on a twisted old tree growing almost along the ground, and, all throbbing and bewildered, gazed vacantly at the blossom which had crowned her hair—those pink buds with one white open apple star. What had he done? How had he let himself be thus stampeded by beauty—pity—or—just the spring! He felt curiously happy, all the same; happy and triumphant, with shivers running through his limbs, and a

vague alarm. This was the beginning of—what? The midges bit him, the dancing gnats tried to fly into his mouth, and all the spring around him seemed to grow more lovely and alive; the songs of the cuckoos and the blackbirds, the laughter of the yaffles, the level-slanting sunlight, the apple blossom which had crowned her head——! He got up from the old trunk and strode out of the orchard, wanting space, an open sky, to get on terms with these new sensations. He made for the moor, and from an ash tree in the hedge a magpie flew out to herald him.

Of man—at any age from five years on—who can say he has never been in love? Ashurst had loved his partners at his dancing class; loved his nursery governess; girls in school-holidays; perhaps never been quite out of love, cherishing always some more or less remote admiration. But this was different, not remote at all. Quite a new sensation; terribly delightful, bringing a sense of completed manhood. To be holding in his fingers such a wild flower, to be able to put it to his lips, and feel it tremble with delight against them! What intoxication, and—embarrassment! What to do with it—how meet her next time? His first caress had been cool, pitiful; but the next could not be, now that, by her burning little kiss on his hand, by her pressure of it to her heart, he knew

that she loved him. Some natures are coarsened by love bestowed on them; others, like Ashurst's, are swayed and drawn, warmed and softened, almost exalted, by what they feel to be a sort of miracle.

And up there among the tors he was racked between the passionate desire to revel in this new sensation of spring fulfilled within him, and a vague but very real uneasiness. At one moment he gave himself up completely to his pride at having captured this pretty, trustful, dewy-eyed thing! At the next he thought with factitious solemnity: 'Yes, my boy! But look out what you're doing! You know what comes of it!'

Dusk dropped down without his noticing—dusk on the carved, Assyrian-looking masses of the rocks. And the voice of Nature said: "This is a new world for you!" As when a man gets up at four o'clock and goes out into a summer morning, and beasts, birds, trees stare at him and he feels as if all had been made new.

He stayed up there for hours, till it grew cold, then groped his way down the stones and heather roots to the road, back into the lane, and came again past the wild meadow to the orchard. There he struck a match and looked at his watch. Nearly twelve! It was black and unstirring in there now, very different from the lingering, bird-

befriended brightness of six hours ago! And suddenly he saw this idyll of his with the eyes of the outer world—had mental vision of Mrs. Narracombe's snake-like neck turned, her quick dark glance taking it all in, her shrewd face hardening; saw the gipsy-like cousins coarsely mocking and distrustful; Joe stolid and furious; only the lame man, Jim, with the suffering eyes, seemed tolerable to his mind. And the village pub!—the gossiping matrons he passed on his walks; and then—his own friends—Robert Garton's smile when he went off that morning ten days ago; so ironical and knowing! Disgusting! For a minute he literally hated this earthy, cynical world to which one belonged, willy-nilly. The gate where he was leaning grew grey, a sort of shimmer passed before him and spread into the bluish darkness. The moon! He could just see it over the bank behind; red, nearly round—a strange moon! And turning away, he went up the lane which smelled of the night and cow-dung and young leaves. In the straw-yard he could see the dark shapes of cattle, broken by the pale sickles of their horns, like so many thin moons, fallen ends-up. He unlatched the farm gate stealthily. All was dark in the house. Muffling his footsteps, he gained the porch, and, blotted against one of the yew trees, looked up at Megan's window. It was open. Was

she sleeping, or lying awake perhaps, disturbed—unhappy at his absence? An owl hooted while he stood there peering up, and the sound seemed to fill the whole night, so quiet was all else, save for the never-ending murmur of the stream running below the orchard. The cuckoos by day, and now the owls—how wonderfully they voiced this troubled ecstasy within him! And suddenly he saw her at her window, looking out. He moved a little from the yew tree, and whispered: "Megan!" She drew back, vanished, reappeared, leaning far down. He stole forward on the grass patch, hit his shin against the green-painted chair, and held his breath at the sound. The pale blur of her stretched-down arm and face did not stir; he moved the chair, and noiselessly mounted it. By stretching up his arm he could just reach. Her hand held the huge key of the front door, and he clasped that burning hand with the cold key in it. He could just see her face, the glint of teeth between her lips, her tumbled hair. She was still dressed—poor child, sitting up for him, no doubt! "Pretty Megan!" Her hot, roughened fingers clung to his; her face had a strange, lost look. To have been able to reach it—even with his hand! The owl hooted, a scent of sweetbriar crept into his nostrils. Then one of the farm dogs barked; her grasp relaxed, she shrank back.

"Good-night, Megan!"

"Good-night, sir!" She was gone! With a sigh he dropped back to earth, and sitting on that chair, took off his boots. Nothing for it but to creep in and go to bed; yet for a long while he sat unmoving, his feet chilly in the dew, drunk on the memory of her lost, half-smiling face, and the clinging grip of her burning fingers, pressing the cold key into his hand.

§ 5 §

He awoke feeling as if he had eaten heavily overnight, instead of having eaten nothing. And far off, unreal, seemed yesterday's romance! Yet it was a golden morning. Full spring had burst at last—in one night the "goldie-cups," as the little boys called them, seemed to have made the field their own, and from his window he could see apple blossoms covering the orchard as with a rose and white quilt. He went down almost dreading to see Megan; and yet, when not she but Mrs. Narracombe brought in his breakfast, he felt vexed and disappointed. The woman's quick eye and snaky neck seemed to have a new alacrity this morning. Had she noticed?

"So you an' the moon went walkin' last night, Mr. Ashurst! Did ye have your supper anywheres?"

Ashurst shook his head.

"We kept it for you, but I suppose you was too busy in your brain to think o' such a thing as that?"

Was she mocking him, in that voice of hers, which still kept some Welsh crispness against the invading burr of the West Country? If she knew! And at that moment he thought: 'No, no; I'll clear out. I won't put myself in such a beastly false position.'

But, after breakfast, the longing to see Megan began and increased with every minute, together with fear lest something should have been said to her which had spoiled everything. Sinister that she had not appeared, not given him even a glimpse of her! And the love poem, whose manufacture had been so important and absorbing yesterday afternoon under the apple trees, now seemed so paltry that he tore it up and rolled it into pipe spills. What had he known of love, till she seized his hand and kissed it! And now—what did he not know? But to write of it seemed mere insipidity! He went up to his bedroom to get a book, and his heart began to beat violently, for she was in there making the bed. He stood in the doorway watching; and suddenly, with turbulent joy, he saw her stoop and kiss his pillow, just at the hollow made by his head last night.

How let her know he had seen that pretty act of devotion? And yet, if she heard him stealing away, it would be even worse. She took the pillow up, holding it as if reluctant to shake out the impress of his cheek, dropped it, and turned round.

"Megan!"

She put her hands up to her cheeks, but her eyes seemed to look right into him. He had never before realised the depth and purity and touching faithfulness in those dew-bright eyes, and he stammered:

"It was sweet of you to wait up for me last night."

She still said nothing, and he stammered on:

"I was wandering about on the moor; it was such a jolly night. I—I've just come up for a book."

Then, the kiss he had seen her give the pillow afflicted him with sudden headiness, and he went up to her. Touching her eyes with his lips, he thought with queer excitement: 'I've done it! Yesterday all was sudden—anyhow; but now—I've done it!' The girl let her forehead rest against his lips, which moved downwards till they reached hers. That first real lover's kiss—strange, wonderful, still almost innocent—in which heart did it make the most disturbance?

"Come to the big apple tree to-night, after they've gone to bed. Megan—promise!"

She whispered back: "I promise."

Then, scared at her white face, scared at everything, he let her go, and went downstairs again. Yes! he had done it now! Accepted her love, declared his own! He went out to the green chair as devoid of a book as ever; and there he sat staring vacantly before him, triumphant and remorseful, while under his nose and behind his back the work of the farm went on. How long he had been sitting in that curious state of vacancy he had no notion when he saw Joe standing a little behind him to the right. The youth had evidently come from hard work in the fields, and stood shifting his feet, breathing loudly, his face coloured like a setting sun, and his arms, below the rolled-up sleeves of his blue shirt, showing the hue and furry sheen of ripe peaches. His red lips were open, his blue eyes with their flaxen lashes stared fixedly at Ashurst, who said ironically:

"Well, Joe, anything I can do for you?"

"Yeas."

"What, then?"

"Yu can goo away from yere. Us don' want yu."

Ashurst's face, never too humble, assumed its most lordly look.

"Very good of you, but, do you know, I prefer the others should speak for themselves."

The youth moved a pace or two nearer, and the scent of his honest heat afflicted Ashurst's nostrils.

"What d'yu stay yere for?"

"Because it pleases me."

"Twon't please yu when I've bashed yure head in!"

"Indeed! When would you like to begin that?"

Joe answered only with the loudness of his breathing, but his eyes looked like those of a young and angry bull. Then a sort of spasm seemed to convulse his face.

"Megan don' want yu."

A rush of jealousy, of contempt, and anger with this thick, loud-breathing rustic got the better of Ashurst's self-possession; he jumped up, and pushed back his chair.

"You can go to the devil!"

And as he said those simple words, he saw Megan in the doorway with a tiny brown spaniel puppy in her arms. She came up to him quickly:

"Its eyes are blue!" she said.

Joe turned away; the back of his neck was literally crimson.

Ashurst put his finger to the mouth of the little brown bull-frog of a creature in her arms. How cosy it looked against her!

"It's fond of you already. Ah! Megan, everything is fond of *you*."

"What was Joe saying to you, please?"

"Telling me to go away, because you didn't want me here."

She stamped her foot; then looked up at Ashurst. At that adoring look he felt his nerves quiver, just as if he had seen a moth scorching its wings.

"To-night!" he said. "Don't forget!"

"No." And smothering her face against the puppy's little fat, brown body, she slipped back into the house.

Ashurst wandered down the lane. At the gate of the wild meadow he came on the lame man and his cows.

"Beautiful day, Jim!"

"Ah! 'Tes brave weather for the grass. The ashes be later than th' oaks this year. 'When th' oak before th' ash——'"

Ashurst said idly: "Where were you standing when you saw the gipsy bogle, Jim?"

"It might be under that big apple tree, as you might say."

"And you really do think it was there?"

The lame man answered cautiously:

"I shouldn't like to say rightly that 't *was* there. 'Twas in my mind as 'twas there."

"What do you make of it?"

The lame man lowered his voice.

"They du zay old master, Mist' Narracombe come o' gipsy stock. But that's tellin'. They'm a wonderful people, yu know, for claimin' their own. Maybe they knu 'e was goin', and sent this feller along for company. That's what I've a-thought about it."

"What was he like?"

"'E 'ad 'air all over 'is face, an' goin' like this, he was, zame as if 'e 'ad a viddle. They zay there's no such thing as bogles, but I've a-zeen the 'air on this dog standin' up of a dark naight, when I couldn' zee nothin', meself."

"Was there a moon?"

"Yeas, very near full, but 'twas on'y just risen, gold-like be'ind them trees."

"And you think a ghost means trouble, do you?"

The lame man pushed his hat up; his aspiring eyes looked at Ashurst more earnestly than ever.

"'Tes not for me to zay that—but 'tes they bein' so unrestin'-like. There's things us don' understand, that's zartin, for zure. There's people that zee things, tu, an' others that don't never zee nothin'. Now, our Joe—yu might putt anything under 'is eyes an' 'e'd never zee it; and them other boys, tu, they'm rattlin' fellers. But yu

take an' putt our Megan where there's suthin', she'll zee it, an' more tu, or I'm mistaken."

"She's sensitive, that's why."

"What's that?"

"I mean, she feels everything."

"Ah! She'm very lovin'-'earted."

Ashurst, who felt colour coming into his cheeks, held out his tobacco pouch.

"Have a fill, Jim?"

"Thank 'ee, sir. She'm one in an 'underd, I think."

"I expect so," said Ashurst shortly, and folding up his pouch, walked on.

"Lovin'-hearted!" Yes! And what was he doing? What were his intentions—as they say—towards this loving-hearted girl? The thought dogged him, wandering through fields bright with buttercups, where the little red calves were feeding, and the swallows flying high. Yes, the oaks were before the ashes, brown-gold already; every tree in different stage and hue. The cuckoos and a thousand birds were singing; the little streams were very bright. The ancients believed in a golden age, in the garden of the Hesperides! . . . A queen wasp settled on his sleeve. Each queen wasp killed meant two thousand fewer wasps to thieve the apples which would grow from that blossom in the orchard; but who, with love in his

heart, could kill anything on a day like this? He entered a field where a young red bull was feeding. It seemed to Ashurst that he looked like Joe. But the young bull took no notice of this visitor, a little drunk himself, perhaps, on the singing and the glamour of the golden pasture, under his short legs. Ashurst crossed out unchallenged to the hillside above the stream. From that slope a tor mounted to its crown of rocks. The ground there was covered with a mist of bluebells, and nearly a score of crab-apple trees were in full bloom. He threw himself down on the grass. The change from the buttercup glory and oak-goldened glamour of the fields to this ethereal beauty under the grey tor filled him with a sort of wonder; nothing the same, save the sound of running water and the songs of the cuckoos. He lay there a long time, watching the sunlight wheel till the crab-trees threw shadows over the bluebells, his only companions a few wild bees. He was not quite sane, thinking of that morning's kiss, and of to-night under the apple tree. In such a spot as this, fauns and dryads surely lived; nymphs, white as the crab-apple blossom, retired within those trees; fauns, brown as the dead bracken, with pointed ears, lay in wait for them. The cuckoos were still calling when he woke, there was the sound of running water; but the sun had

couched behind the tor, the hillside was cool, and some rabbits had come out. 'To-night!' he thought. Just as from the earth everything was pushing up, unfolding under the soft insistent fingers of an unseen hand, so were his heart and senses being pushed, unfolded. He got up and broke off a spray from a crab-apple tree. The buds were like Megan—shell-like, rose-pink, wild, and fresh; and so, too, the opening flowers, white, and wild, and touching. He put the spray into his coat. And all the rush of the spring within him escaped in a triumphant sigh. But the rabbits scurried away.

6 §

It was nearly eleven that night when Ashurst put down the pocket "Odyssey" which for half an hour he had held in his hands without reading, and slipped through the yard down to the orchard. The moon had just risen, very golden, over the hill, and like a bright, powerful, watching spirit peered through the bars of an ash tree's half-naked boughs. In among the apple trees it was still dark, and he stood making sure of his direction, feeling the rough grass with his feet. A black mass close behind him stirred with a heavy grunting sound, and three large pigs settled down again close to each other, under the

wall. He listened. There was no wind, but the stream's burbling whispering chuckle had gained twice its daytime strength. One bird, he could not tell what, cried "Pip—pip," "Pip—pip," with perfect monotony; he could hear a night-jar spinning very far off; an owl hooting. Ashurst moved a step or two, and again halted, aware of a dim living whiteness all round his head. On the dark unstirring trees innumerable flowers and buds all soft and blurred were being bewitched to life by the creeping moonlight. He had the oddest feeling of actual companionship, as if a million white moths or spirits had floated in and settled between dark sky and darker ground, and were opening and shutting their wings on a level with his eyes. In the bewildering, still, scentless beauty of that moment he almost lost memory of why he had come to the orchard. The flying glamour which had clothed the earth all day had not gone now that night had fallen, but only changed into this new form. He moved on through the thicket of stems and boughs covered with that live powdering whiteness, till he reached the big apple tree. No mistaking that, even in the dark, nearly twice the height and size of any other, and leaning out towards the open meadows and the stream. Under the thick branches he stood still again, to listen. The same sounds exactly, and a

faint grunting from the sleepy pigs. He put his hands on the dry, almost warm tree trunk, whose rough mossy surface gave forth a peaty scent at his touch. Would she come—would she? And among these quivering, haunted, moon-witched trees he was seized with doubts of everything! All was unearthly here, fit for no earthly lovers; fit only for god and goddess, faun and nymph—not for him and this little country girl. Would it not be almost a relief if she did not come? But all the time he was listening. And still that unknown bird went "Pip—pip," "Pip—pip," and there rose the busy chatter of the little trout stream, whereon the moon was flinging glances through the bars of her tree-prison. The blossom on a level with his eyes seemed to grow more living every moment, seemed with its mysterious white beauty more and more a part of his suspense. He plucked a fragment and held it close—three blossoms. Sacrilege to pluck fruit-tree blossom—soft, sacred, young blossom—and throw it away! Then suddenly he heard the gate close, the pigs stirring again and grunting; and leaning against the trunk, he pressed his hands to its mossy sides behind him, and held his breath. She might have been a spirit threading the trees, for all the noise she made! Then he saw her quite close—her dark form part of a little tree, her white face part of

its blossom; so still, and peering towards him. He whispered: "Megan!" and held out his hands. She ran forward, straight to his breast. When he felt her heart beating against him, Ashurst knew to the full the sensations of chivalry and passion. Because she was not of his world, because she was so simple and young and headlong, adoring and defenceless, how could he be other than her protector, in the dark! Because she was all simple Nature and beauty, as much a part of this spring night as was the living blossom, how should he not take all that she would give him—how not fulfil the spring in her heart and his! And torn between these two emotions he clasped her close, and kissed her hair. How long they stood there without speaking he knew not. The stream went on chattering, the owls hooting, the moon kept stealing up and growing whiter; the blossom all round them and above brightened in suspense of living beauty. Their lips had sought each other's, and they did not speak. The moment speech began all would be unreal! Spring has no speech, nothing but rustling and whispering. Spring has so much more than speech in its unfolding flowers and leaves, and the coursing of its streams, and in its sweet restless seeking! And sometimes spring will come alive, and, like a mysterious Presence stand, encircling lovers with

its arms, laying on them the fingers of enchantment, so that, standing lips to lips, they forget everything but just a kiss. While her heart beat against him, and her lips quivered on his, Ashurst felt nothing but simple rapture—Destiny meant her for his arms, Love could not be flouted! But when their lips parted for breath, division began again at once. Only, passion now was so much the stronger, and he sighed:

"Oh! Megan! Why did you come?"

She looked up, hurt, amazed.

"Sir, you asked me to."

"Don't call me 'sir,' my pretty sweet."

"What should I be callin' you?"

"Frank."

"I could not. Oh, no!"

"But you love me—don't you?"

"I could not help lovin' you. I want to be with you—that's all."

"All!"

So faint that he hardly heard, she whispered:

"I shall die if I can't be with you."

Ashurst took a mighty breath.

"Come and be with me, then!"

"Oh!"

Intoxicated by the awe and rapture in that "Oh!" he went on, whispering:

"We'll go to London. I'll show you the world.

And I *will* take care of you, I promise, Megan. I'll never be a brute to you!"

"If I can be with you—that is all."

He stroked her hair, and whispered on:

"To-morrow I'll go to Torquay and get some money, and get you some clothes that won't be noticed, and then we'll steal away. And when we get to London, soon perhaps, if you love me well enough, we'll be married."

He could feel her hair shiver with the shake of her head.

"Oh, no! I could not. I only want to be with you!"

Drunk on his own chivalry, Ashurst went on murmuring:

"It's I who am not good enough for you. Oh! Megan, when did you begin to love me?"

"When I saw you in the road, and you looked at me. The first night I loved you; but I never thought you would want me."

She slipped down suddenly to her knees, trying to kiss his feet.

A shiver of horror went through Ashurst; he lifted her up bodily and held her fast—too upset to speak.

She whispered: "Why won't you let me?"

"It's I who will kiss your feet!"

Her smile brought tears into his eyes. The

whiteness of her moonlit face so close to his, the faint pink of her opened lips, had the living unearthly beauty of the apple blossom.

And then, suddenly, her eyes widened and stared past him painfully; she writhed out of his arms, and whispered: "Look!"

Ashurst saw nothing but the brightened stream, the furze faintly gilded, the beech trees glistening, and behind them all the wide loom of the moonlit hill. Behind him came her frozen whisper: "The gipsy bogle!"

"Where?"

"There—by the stone—under the trees!"

Exasperated, he leaped the stream, and strode towards the beech clump. Prank of the moonlight! Nothing! In and out of the boulders and thorn trees, muttering and cursing, yet with a kind of terror, he rushed and stumbled. Absurd! Silly! Then he went back to the apple tree. But she was gone; he could hear a rustle, the grunting of the pigs, the sound of a gate closing. Instead of her, only this old apple tree! He flung his arms round the trunk. What a substitute for her soft body; the rough moss against his face—what a substitute for her soft cheek; only the scent, as of the woods, a little the same! And above him, and around, the blossoms, more living, more moonlit than ever, seemed to glow and breathe.

7 §

Descending from the train at Torquay station, Ashurst wandered uncertainly along the front, for he did not know this particular queen of English watering places. Having little sense of what he had on, he was quite unconscious of being remarkable among its inhabitants, and strode along in his rough Norfolk jacket, dusty boots, and battered hat, without observing that people gazed at him rather blankly. He was seeking a branch of his London bank, and having found one, found also the first obstacle to his mood. Did he know anyone in Torquay? No. In that case, if he would wire to his bank in London, they would be happy to oblige him on receipt of the reply. That suspicious breath from the matter-of-fact world somewhat tarnished the brightness of his visions. But he sent the telegram.

Nearly opposite to the post office he saw a shop full of ladies' garments, and examined the window with strange sensations. To have to undertake the clothing of his rustic love was more than a little disturbing. He went in. A young woman came forward; she had blue eyes and a faintly puzzled forehead. Ashurst stared at her in silence.

"Yes, sir?"

"I want a dress for a young lady."

The young woman smiled. Ashurst frowned—the peculiarity of his request struck him with sudden force.

The young woman added hastily:

"What style would you like—something modish?"

"No. Simple."

"What figure would the young lady be?"

"I don't know; about two inches shorter than you, I should say."

"Could you give me her waist measurement?"

Megan's waist!

"Oh! anything usual!"

"Quite!"

While she was gone he stood disconsolately eyeing the models in the window, and suddenly it seemed to him incredible that Megan—his Megan—could ever be dressed save in the rough tweed skirt, coarse blouse, and tam-o'-shanter cap he was wont to see her in. The young woman had come back with several dresses in her arms, and Ashurst eyed her laying them against her own modish figure. There was one whose colour he liked, a dove-grey, but to imagine Megan clothed in it was beyond him. The young woman went away, and brought some more. But on Ashurst there had now come a feeling of paraly-

sis. How choose? She would want a hat too, and shoes, and gloves; and, suppose, when he had got them all, they commonised her, as Sunday clothes always commonised village folk! Why should she not travel as she was? Ah! But conspicuousness would matter; this was a serious elopement. And, staring at the young woman, he thought: 'I wonder if she guesses, and thinks me a blackguard?'

"Do you mind putting aside that grey one for me?" he said desperately at last. "I can't decide now; I'll come in again this afternoon."

The young woman sighed.

"Oh! certainly. It's a very tasteful costume. I don't think you'll get anything that will suit your purpose better."

"I expect not," Ashurst murmured, and went out.

Freed again from the suspicious matter-of-factness of the world, he took a long breath, and went back to visions. In fancy he saw the trustful, pretty creature who was going to join her life to his; saw himself and her stealing forth at night, walking over the moor under the moon, he with his arm round her, and carrying her new garments, till, in some far-off wood, when dawn was coming, she would slip off her old things and put on these, and an early train at a distant station

would bear them away on their honeymoon journey, till London swallowed them up, and the dreams of love came true.

"Frank Ashurst! Haven't seen you since Rugby, old chap!"

Ashurst's frown dissolved; the face, close to his own, was blue-eyed, suffused with sun—one of those faces where sun from within and without join in a sort of lustre. And he answered:

"Phil Halliday, by Jove!"

"What are you doing here?"

"Oh! nothing. Just looking round, and getting some money. I'm staying on the moor."

"Are you lunching anywhere? Come and lunch with us; I'm here with my young sisters. They've had measles."

Hooked in by that friendly arm Ashurst went along, up a hill, down a hill, away out of the town, while the voice of Halliday, redolent of optimism as his face was of sun, explained how "in this mouldy place the only decent things were the bathing and boating," and so on, till presently they came to a crescent of houses a little above and back from the sea, and into the centre one—an hotel—made their way.

"Come up to my room and have a wash. Lunch'll be ready in a jiffy."

Ashurst contemplated his visage in a looking-

glass. After his farmhouse bedroom, the comb and one spare shirt *régime* of the last fortnight, this room littered with clothes and brushes was a sort of Capua; and he thought: 'Queer—one doesn't realise——' But what—he did not quite know.

When he followed Halliday into the sitting-room for lunch, three faces, very fair and blue-eyed, were turned suddenly at the words: "This is Frank Ashurst—my young sisters."

Two were indeed young, about eleven and ten. The third was perhaps seventeen, tall and fair-haired too, with pink-and-white cheeks just touched by the sun, and eyebrows, rather darker than the hair, running a little upwards from her nose to their outer points. The voices of all three were like Halliday's, high and cheerful; they stood up straight, shook hands with a quick movement, looked at Ashurst critically, away again at once, and began to talk of what they were going to do in the afternoon. A regular Diana and attendant nymphs! After the farm this crisp, slangy, eager talk, this cool, clean, off-hand refinement, was queer at first, and then so natural that what he had come from became suddenly remote. The names of the two little ones seemed to be Sabina and Freda; of the eldest, Stella.

Presently the one called Sabina turned to him and said:

"I say, will you come shrimping with us?—it's awful fun!"

Surprised by this unexpected friendliness, Ashurst murmured:

"I'm afraid I've got to get back this afternoon."

"Oh!"

"Can't you put it off?"

Ashurst turned to the new speaker, Stella, shook his head, and smiled. She was very pretty! Sabina said regretfully: "You might!" Then the talk switched off to caves and swimming.

"Can you swim far?"

"About two miles."

"Oh!"

"I say!"

"How jolly!"

The three pairs of blue eyes, fixed on him, made him conscious of his new importance. The sensation was agreeable. Halliday said:

"I say, you simply must stop and have a bathe. You'd better stay the night."

"Yes, do!"

But again Ashurst smiled and shook his head. Then suddenly he found himself being catechised about his physical achievements. He had rowed

—it seemed—in his college boat, played in his college football team, won his college mile; and he rose from table a sort of hero. The two little girls insisted that he must see "their" cave, and they set forth chattering like magpies, Ashurst between them, Stella and her brother a little behind. In the cave, damp and darkish like any other cave, the great feature was a pool with possibility of creatures which might be caught and put into bottles. Sabina and Freda, who wore no stockings on their shapely brown legs, exhorted Ashurst to join them in the middle of it, and help sieve the water. He too was soon bootless and sockless. Time goes fast for one who has a sense of beauty, when there are pretty children in a pool and a young Diana on the edge, to receive with wonder anything you can catch! Ashurst never had much sense of time. It was a shock when, pulling out his watch, he saw it was well past three. No cashing his cheque to-day—the bank would be closed before he could get there. Watching his expression, the little girls cried out at once:

"Hurrah! Now you'll have to stay!"

Ashurst did not answer. He was seeing again Megan's face, when at breakfast time he had whispered: "I'm going to Torquay, darling, to get everything; I shall be back this evening. If

it's fine we can go to-night. Be ready." He was seeing again how she quivered and hung on his words. What would she think? Then he pulled himself together, conscious suddenly of the calm scrutiny of this other young girl, so tall and fair and Diana-like, at the edge of the pool, of her wondering blue eyes under those brows which slanted up a little. If they knew what was in his mind—if they knew that this very night he had meant——! Well, there would be a little sound of disgust, and he would be alone in the cave. And with a curious mixture of anger, chagrin, and shame, he put his watch back into his pocket and said abruptly:

"Yes; I'm dished for to-day."

"Hurrah! Now you can bathe with us."

It was impossible not to succumb a little to the contentment of these pretty children, to the smile on Stella's lips, to Halliday's "Ripping, old chap! I can lend you things for the night!" But again a spasm of longing and remorse throbbed through Ashurst, and he said moodily:

"I must send a wire!"

The attractions of the pool palling, they went back to the hotel. Ashurst sent his wire, addressing it to Mrs. Narracombe: "Sorry, detained for the night, back to-morrow." Surely Megan would understand that he had too much to do; and his

heart grew lighter. It was a lovely afternoon, warm, the sea calm and blue, and swimming his great passion; the favour of these pretty children flattered him, the pleasure of looking at them, at Stella, at Halliday's sunny face; the slight unreality, yet extreme naturalness of it all—as of a last peep at normality before he took this plunge with Megan! He got his borrowed bathing dress, and they all set forth. Halliday and he undressed behind one rock, the three girls behind another. He was first into the sea, and at once swam out with the bravado of justifying his self-given reputation. When he turned he could see Halliday swimming along shore, and the girls flopping and dipping, and riding the little waves, in the way he was accustomed to despise, but now thought pretty and sensible, since it gave him the distinction of the only deep-water fish. But drawing near, he wondered if they would like him, a stranger, to come into their splashing group; he felt shy, approaching that slim nymph. Then Sabina summoned him to teach her to float, and between them the little girls kept him so busy that he had no time even to notice whether Stella was accustomed to his presence, till suddenly he heard a startled sound from her. She was standing submerged to the waist, leaning a little forward, her slim white arms stretched out and

pointing, her wet face puckered by the sun and an expression of fear.

"Look at Phil! Is he all right? Oh, look!"

Ashurst saw at once that Phil was not all right. He was splashing and struggling out of his depth, perhaps a hundred yards away; suddenly he gave a cry, threw up his arms, and went down. Ashurst saw the girl launch herself towards him, and crying out: "Go back, Stella! Go back!" he dashed out. He had never swum so fast, and reached Halliday just as he was coming up a second time. It was a case of cramp, but to get him in was not difficult, for he did not struggle. The girl, who had stopped where Ashurst told her to, helped as soon as he was in his depth, and once on the beach they sat down one on each side of him to rub his limbs, while the little ones stood by with scared faces. Halliday was soon smiling. It was—he said—rotten of him, absolutely rotten! If Frank would give him an arm, he could get to his clothes all right now. Ashurst gave him the arm, and as he did so caught sight of Stella's face, wet and flushed and tearful, all broken up out of its calm; and he thought: 'I called her Stella! Wonder if she minded?'

While they were dressing, Halliday said quietly:

"You saved my life, old chap!"

"Rot!"

Clothed, but not quite in their right minds, they went up all together to the hotel and sat down to tea, except Halliday, who was lying down in his room. After some slices of bread and jam, Sabina said:

"I say, you know, you *are* a brick!" And Freda chimed in:

"Rather!"

Ashurst saw Stella looking down; he got up in confusion, and went to the window. From there he heard Sabina mutter: "I say, let's swear blood bond. Where's your knife, Freda?" and out of the corner of his eye could see each of them solemnly prick herself, squeeze out a drop of blood and dabble on a bit of paper. He turned and made for the door.

"Don't be a stoat! Come back!" His arms were seized; imprisoned between the little girls he was brought back to the table. On it lay a piece of paper with an effigy drawn in blood, and the three names Stella Halliday, Sabina Halliday, Freda Halliday—also in blood, running towards it like the rays of a star. Sabina said:

"That's you. We shall have to kiss you, you know."

And Freda echoed:

"Oh! Blow—Yes!"

Before Ashurst could escape, some wettish hair dangled against his face, something like a bite descended on his nose, he felt his left arm pinched, and other teeth softly searching his cheek. Then he was released, and Freda said:

"Now, Stella."

Ashurst, red and rigid, looked across the table at a red and rigid Stella. Sabina giggled; Freda cried:

'Buck up—it spoils everything!"

A queer, ashamed eagerness shot through Ashurst: then he said quietly:

"Shut up, you little demons!"

Again Sabina giggled.

"Well, then, she can kiss her hand, and you can put it against your nose. It *is* on one side!"

To his amazement the girl did kiss her hand and stretch it out. Solemnly he took that cool, slim hand and laid it to his cheek. The two little girls broke into clapping, and Freda said:

"Now, then, we shall have to save your life at any time; that's settled. Can I have another cup, Stella, not so beastly weak?"

Tea was resumed, and Ashurst, folding up the paper, put it in his pocket. The talk turned on the advantages of measles, tangerine oranges, honey in a spoon, no lessons, and so forth. Ashurst listened, silent, exchanging friendly looks with

Stella, whose face was again of its normal sun-touched pink and white. It was soothing to be so taken to the heart of this jolly family, fascinating to watch their faces. And after tea, while the two little girls pressed seaweed, he talked to Stella in the window seat and looked at her water-colour sketches. The whole thing was like a pleasurable dream; time and incident hung up, importance and reality suspended. Tomorrow he would go back to Megan, with nothing of all this left save the paper with the blood of these children, in his pocket. Children! Stella was not quite that—as old as Megan! Her talk—quick, rather hard and shy, yet friendly—seemed to flourish on his silences, and about her there was something cool and virginal—a maiden in a bower. At dinner, to which Halliday, who had swallowed too much sea-water, did not come, Sabina said:

"I'm going to call you Frank."

Freda echoed:

"Frank, Frank, Franky."

Ashurst grinned and bowed.

"Every time Stella calls you Mr. Ashurst, she's got to pay a forfeit. It's ridiculous."

Ashurst looked at Stella, who grew slowly red. Sabina giggled; Freda cried:

"She's 'smoking'—'smoking!'—Yah!"

Ashurst reached out to right and left, and grasped some fair hair in each hand.

"Look here," he said, "you two! Leave Stella alone, or I'll tie you together!"

Freda gurgled:

"Ouch! You *are* a beast!"

Sabina murmured cautiously:

"*You* call *her* Stella, you see!"

"Why shouldn't I? It's a jolly name!"

"All right; we give you leave to!"

Ashurst released the hair. Stella! What would she call him—after this? But she called him nothing; till at bedtime he said, deliberately:

"Good-night, Stella!"

"Good-night, Mr.—— Good-night, Frank! It *was* jolly of you, you know!"

"Oh—that! Bosh!"

Her quick, straight handshake tightened suddenly, and as suddenly became slack.

Ashurst stood motionless in the empty sitting-room. Only last night, under the apple tree and the living blossom, he had held Megan to him, kissing her eyes and lips. And he gasped, swept by that rush of remembrance. To-night it should have begun—his life with her who only wanted to be with him! And now, twenty-four hours and more must pass, because—of not looking at his watch! Why had he made friends with this fam-

ily of innocents just when he was saying good-bye to innocence, and all the rest of it? 'But I mean to marry her,' he thought; 'I told her so!'

He took a candle, lighted it, and went to his bedroom, which was next to Halliday's. His friend's voice called, as he was passing:

"Is that you, old chap? I say, come in."

He was sitting up in bed, smoking a pipe and reading.

"Sit down a bit."

Ashurst sat down by the open window.

"I've been thinking about this afternoon, you know," said Halliday rather suddenly. "They say you go through all your past. I didn't. I suppose I wasn't far enough gone."

"What did you think of?"

Halliday was silent for a little, then said quietly:

"Well, I did think of one thing—rather odd—of a girl at Cambridge that I might have—you know; I was glad I hadn't got her on my mind. Anyhow, old chap, I owe it to you that I'm here; I should have been in the big dark by now. No more bed, or baccy; no more anything. I say, what d'you suppose happens to us?"

Ashurst murmured:

"Go out like flames, I expect."

"Phew!"

"We may flicker, and cling about a bit, perhaps."

"H'm! I think that's rather gloomy. I say, I hope my young sisters have been decent to you?"

"Awfully decent."

Halliday put his pipe down, crossed his hands behind his neck, and turned his face towards the window.

"They're not bad kids!" he said.

Watching his friend, lying there, with that smile, and the candle-light on his face, Ashurst shuddered. Quite true! He might have been lying there with no smile, with all that sunny look gone out for ever! He might not have been lying there at all, but "sanded" at the bottom of the sea, waiting for resurrection on the—ninth day, was it? And that smile of Halliday's seemed to him suddenly something wonderful, as if in it were all the difference between life and death—the little flame—the all! He got up, and said softly:

"Well, you ought to sleep, I expect. Shall I blow out?"

Halliday caught his hand.

"I can't say it, you know; but it must be rotten to be dead. Good-night, old boy!"

Stirred and moved, Ashurst squeezed the hand, and went downstairs. The hall door was still open, and he passed out on to the lawn before the

Crescent. The stars were bright in a very dark blue sky, and by their light some lilacs had that mysterious colour of flowers by night which no one can describe. Ashurst pressed his face against a spray; and before his closed eyes Megan started up, with the tiny brown spaniel pup against her breast. "I thought of a girl that I might have—you know. I was glad I hadn't got her on my mind!" He jerked his head away from the lilac, and began pacing up and down over the grass, a grey phantom coming to substance for a moment in the light from the lamp at either end. He was with her again under the living, breathing whiteness of the blossom, the stream chattering by, the moon glinting steel-blue on the bathing-pool; back in the rapture of his kisses on her upturned face of innocence and humble passion, back in the suspense and beauty of that pagan night. He stood still once more in the shadow of the lilacs. Here the sea, not the stream, was Night's voice; the sea with its sigh and rustle; no little bird, no owl, no night-jar called or spun; but a piano tinkled, and the white houses cut the sky with solid curve, and the scent from the lilacs filled the air. A window of the hotel, high up, was lighted; he saw a shadow move across the blind. And most queer sensations stirred within him, a sort of churning, and twining, and turning of a

single emotion on itself, as though spring and love, bewildered and confused, seeking the way, were baffled. This girl, who had called him Frank, whose hand had given his that sudden little clutch, this girl so cool and pure—what would *she* think of such wild, unlawful loving? He sank down on the grass, sitting there cross-legged, with his back to the house, motionless as some carved Buddha. Was he really going to break through innocence, and steal? Sniff the scent out of a wild flower, and—perhaps—throw it away? "Of a girl at Cambridge that I might have—you know!" He put his hands to the grass, one on each side, palms downwards, and pressed; it was just warm still—the grass, barely moist, soft and firm and friendly. 'What am I going to do?' he thought. Perhaps Megan was at her window, looking out at the blossom, thinking of him! Poor little Megan! 'Why not?' he thought. 'I love her! But do I—really love her? or do I only want her because she is so pretty, and loves me? What am I going to do?' The piano tinkled on, the stars winked; and Ashurst gazed out before him at the dark sea, as if spell-bound. He got up at last, cramped and rather chilly. There was no longer light in any window. And he went in to bed.

§ 8 §

Out of a deep and dreamless sleep he was awakened by the sound of thumping on the door. A shrill voice called:

"Hi! Breakfast's ready."

He jumped up. Where was he——? Ah!

He found them already eating marmalade, and sat down in the empty place between Stella and Sabina, who, after watching him a little, said:

"I say, do buck up; we're going to start at half-past nine."

"We're going to Berry Head, old chap; you *must* come!"

Ashurst thought: 'Come! Impossible. I shall be getting things and going back.' He looked at Stella. She said quickly:

"Do come!"

Sabina chimed in:

"It'll be no fun without you."

Freda got up and stood behind his chair.

"You've got to come, or else I'll pull your hair!"

Ashurst thought: 'Well—one day more—to think it over! One day more!' And he said:

"All right! You needn't tweak my mane!"

"Hurrah!"

At the station he wrote a second telegram to the

farm, and then—tore it up; he could not have explained why. From Brixham they drove in a very little wagonette. There, squeezed between Sabina and Freda, with his knees touching Stella's, they played "Up, Jenkins"; and the gloom he was feeling gave way to frolic. In this one day more to think it over, he did not want to think! They ran races, wrestled, paddled—for to-day nobody wanted to bathe—they sang catches, played games, and ate all they had brought. The little girls fell asleep against him on the way back, and his knees still touched Stella's in the narrow wagonette. It seemed incredible that thirty hours ago he had never set eyes on any of those three flaxen heads. In the train he talked to Stella of poetry, discovering her favourites, and telling her his own with a pleasing sense of superiority; till suddenly she said, rather low:

"Phil says you don't believe in a future life, Frank. I think that's dreadful."

Disconcerted, Ashurst muttered:

"I don't either believe or not believe—I simply don't know."

She said quickly:

"I couldn't bear that. What would be the use of living?"

Watching the frown of those pretty oblique brows, Ashurst answered:

"I don't believe in believing things because one wants to."

"But why should one *wish* to live again, if one isn't going to?"

And she looked full at him.

He did not want to hurt her, but an itch to dominate pushed him on to say:

"While one's alive one naturally wants to go on living for ever; that's part of being alive. But it probably isn't anything more."

"Don't you believe in the Bible at all, then?"

Ashurst thought: 'Now I shall really hurt her!'

"I believe in the Sermon on the Mount, because it's beautiful and good for all time."

"But don't you believe Christ was divine?"

He shook his head.

She turned her face quickly to the window, and there sprang into his mind Megan's prayer, repeated by little Nick: "God bless us all, and Mr. Ashes!" Who else would ever say a prayer for him, like her who at this moment must be waiting—waiting to see him come down the lane? And he thought suddenly: 'What a scoundrel I am!'

All that evening this thought kept coming back; but, as is not unusual, each time with less poignancy, till it seemed almost a matter of course to be a scoundrel. And—strange!—he did

not know whether he was a scoundrel if he meant to go back to Megan, or if he did not mean to go back to her.

They played cards till the children were sent off to bed; then Stella went to the piano. From over on the window seat, where it was nearly dark, Ashurst watched her between the candles —that fair head on the long, white neck bending to the movement of her hands. She played fluently, without much expression; but what a picture she made, the faint golden radiance, a sort of angelic atmosphere—hovering about her! Who could have passionate thoughts or wild desires in the presence of that swaying, white-clothed girl with the seraphic head? She played a thing of Schumann's called "*Warum?*" Then Halliday brought out a flute, and the spell was broken. After this they made Ashurst sing, Stella playing him accompaniments from a book of Schumann songs, till, in the middle of "*Ich grolle nicht,*" two small figures clad in blue dressing-gowns crept in and tried to conceal themselves beneath the piano. The evening broke up in confusion, and what Sabina called "a splendid rag."

That night Ashurst hardly slept at all. He was thinking, tossing and turning. The intense domestic intimacy of these last two days, the strength of this Halliday atmosphere, seemed to

ring him round, and make the farm and Megan—even Megan—seem unreal. Had he really made love to her—really promised to take her away to live with him? He must have been bewitched by the spring, the night, the apple blossom! This May madness could but destroy them both! The notion that he was going to make her his mistress—that simple child not yet eighteen—now filled him with a sort of horror, even while it still stung and whipped his blood. He muttered to himself: "It's awful, what I've done—awful!" And the sound of Schumann's music throbbed and mingled with his fevered thoughts, and he saw again Stella's cool, white, fair-haired figure and bending neck, the queer, angelic radiance about her. 'I must have been—I must be—mad!' he thought. 'What came into me? Poor little Megan!' "God bless us all, and Mr. Ashes!" "I want to be with you—only to be with you!" And burying his face in his pillow, he smothered down a fit of sobbing. Not to go back was awful! To go back—more awful still!

Emotion, when you are young, and give real vent to it, loses its power of torture. And he fell asleep, thinking: 'What was it—a few kisses—all forgotten in a month!'

Next morning he got his cheque cashed, but avoided the shop of the dove-grey dress like the

plague; and, instead, bought himself some necessaries. He spent the whole day in a queer mood, cherishing a kind of sullenness against himself. Instead of the hankering of the last two days, he felt nothing but a blank—all passionate longing gone, as if quenched in that outburst of tears. After tea Stella put a book down beside him, and said shyly:

"Have you read that, Frank?"

It was Farrar's "Life of Christ." Ashurst smiled. Her anxiety about his beliefs seemed to him comic, but touching. Infectious too, perhaps, for he began to have an itch to justify himself, if not to convert her. And in the evening, when the children and Halliday were mending their shrimping nets, he said:

"At the back of orthodox religion, so far as I can see, there's always the idea of reward—what you can get for being good; a kind of begging for favours. I think it all starts in fear."

She was sitting on the sofa making reefer knots with a bit of string. She looked up quickly:

"I think it's much deeper than that."

Ashurst felt again that wish to dominate.

"You think so," he said; "but wanting the '*quid pro quo*' is about the deepest thing in all of us! It's jolly hard to get to the bottom of it!"

She wrinkled her brows in a puzzled frown.

"I don't think I understand."

He went on obstinately:

"Well, think, and see if the most religious people aren't those who feel that this life doesn't give them all they want. I believe in being good because to be good is good in itself."

"Then you do believe in being good?"

How pretty she looked now—it was easy to be good with her! And he nodded and said:

"I say, show me how to make that knot!"

With her fingers touching his, in manœuvring the bit of string, he felt soothed and happy. And when he went to bed he wilfully kept his thoughts on her, wrapping himself in her fair, cool sisterly radiance, as in some garment of protection.

Next day he found they had arranged to go by train to Totnes, and picnic at Berry Pomeroy Castle. Still in that resolute oblivion of the past, he took his place with them in the landau beside Halliday, back to the horses. And, then, along the sea front, nearly at the turning to the railway station, his heart almost leaped into his mouth. Megan—Megan herself!—was walking on the far pathway, in her old skirt and jacket and her tam-o'-shanter, looking up into the faces of the passers-by. Instinctively he threw his hand up for cover, then made a feint of clearing dust out

of his eyes; but between his fingers he could see her still, moving, not with her free country step, but wavering, lost-looking, pitiful—like some little dog which has missed its master and does not know whether to run on, to run back—where to run. How had she come like this?—what excuse had she found to get away?—what did she hope for? But with every turn of the wheels bearing him away from her, his heart revolted and cried to him to stop them, to get out, and go to her! When the landau turned the corner to the station he could stand it no more, and opening the carriage door, muttered: "I've forgotten something! Go on—don't wait for me! I'll join you at the castle by the next train!" He jumped, stumbled, spun round, recovered his balance, and walked forward, while the carriage with the astonished Hallidays rolled on.

From the corner he could only just see Megan, a long way ahead now. He ran a few steps, checked himself, and dropped into a walk. With each step nearer to her, further from the Hallidays, he walked more and more slowly. How did it alter anything—this sight of her? How make the going to her, and that which must come of it, less ugly? For there was no hiding it—since he had met the Hallidays he had become gradually sure that he would not marry Megan. It would

only be a wild love-time, a troubled, remorseful, difficult time—and then—well, then he would get tired, just because she gave him everything, was so simple, and so trustful, so dewy. And dew—wears off! The little spot of faded colour, her tam-o'-shanter cap, wavered on far in front of him; she was looking up into every face, and at the house windows. Had any man ever such a cruel moment to go through? Whatever he did, he felt he would be a beast. And he uttered a groan which made a nursemaid turn and stare. He saw Megan stop and lean against the sea-wall, looking at the sea; and he too stopped. Quite likely she had never seen the sea before, and even in her distress could not resist that sight. 'Yes—she's seen nothing,' he thought; 'everything's before her. And just for a few weeks' passion, I shall be cutting her life to ribbons. I'd better go and hang myself rather than do it!' And suddenly he seemed to see Stella's calm eyes looking into his, the wave of fluffy hair on her forehead stirred by the wind. Ah! it would be madness, would mean giving up all that he respected, and his own self-respect. He turned and walked quickly back towards the station. But memory of that poor, bewildered little figure, those anxious eyes searching the passers-by, smote him too hard again, and once more he turned towards the sea.

The cap was no longer visible; that little spot of colour had vanished in the stream of the noon promenaders. And impelled by the passion of longing, the dearth which comes on one when life seems to be whirling something out of reach, he hurried forward. She was nowhere to be seen; for half an hour he looked for her; then on the beach flung himself face downward in the sand. To find her again he knew he had only to go to the station and wait till she returned from her fruitless quest, to take her train home; or to take train himself and go back to the farm, so that she found him there when she returned. But he lay inert in the sand, among the indifferent groups of children with their spades and buckets. Pity at her little figure wandering, seeking, was well-nigh merged in the spring-running of his blood; for it was all wild feeling now—the chivalrous part, what there had been of it, was gone. He wanted her again, wanted her kisses, her soft, little body, her abandonment, all her quick, warm, pagan emotion; wanted the wonderful feeling of that night under the moonlit apple boughs; wanted it all with a horrible intensity, as the faun wants the nymph. The quick chatter of the little bright trout-stream, the dazzle of the buttercups, the rocks of the old "wild men"; the calling of the cuckoos and yaffles, the hooting of the owls; and

the red moon peeping out of the velvet dark at the living whiteness of the blossom; and her face just out of reach at the window, lost in its love-look; and her heart against his, her lips answering his, under the apple tree—all this besieged him. Yet he lay inert. What was it which struggled against pity and this feverish longing, and kept him there paralysed in the warm sand? Three flaxen heads—a fair face with friendly blue-grey eyes, a slim hand pressing his, a quick voice speaking his name—"So you do believe in being good?" Yes, and a sort of atmosphere as of some old walled-in English garden, with pinks, and cornflowers, and roses, and scents of lavender and lilac—cool and fair, untouched, almost holy—all that he had been brought up to feel was clean and good. And suddenly he thought: 'She might come along the front again and see me!' and he got up and made his way to the rock at the far end of the beach. There, with the spray biting into his face, he could think more coolly. To go back to the farm and love Megan out in the woods, among the rocks, with everything around wild and fitting—that, he knew, was impossible, utterly. To transplant her to a great town, to keep, in some little flat or rooms, one who belonged so wholly to Nature—the poet in him shrank from it. His passion would be a mere

sensuous revel, soon gone; in London, her very simplicity, her lack of all intellectual quality, would make her his secret plaything—nothing else. The longer he sat on the rock, with his feet dangling over a greenish pool from which the sea was ebbing, the more clearly he saw this; but it was as if her arms and all of her were slipping slowly, slowly down from him, into the pool, to be carried away out to sea; and her face looking up, her lost face with beseeching eyes, and dark, wet hair—possessed, haunted, tortured him! He got up at last, scaled the low rock-cliff, and made his way down into a sheltered cove. Perhaps in the sea he could get back his control—lose this fever! And stripping off his clothes, he swam out. He wanted to tire himself so that nothing mattered and swam recklessly, fast and far; then suddenly, for no reason, felt afraid. Suppose he could not reach shore again—suppose the current set him out—or he got cramp, like Halliday! He turned to swim in. The red cliffs looked a long way off. If he were drowned they would find his clothes. The Hallidays would know; but Megan perhaps never—they took no newspaper at the farm. And Phil Halliday's words came back to him again: "A girl at Cambridge I might have —— Glad I haven't got her on my mind!" And in that moment of unreasoning fear he vowed he

would not have her on his mind. Then his fear left him; he swam in easily enough, dried himself in the sun, and put on his clothes. His heart felt sore, but no longer ached; his body cool and refreshed.

When one is as young as Ashurst, pity is not a violent emotion. And, back in the Hallidays' sitting-room, eating a ravenous tea, he felt much like a man recovered from fever. Everything seemed new and clear; the tea, the buttered toast and jam tasted absurdly good; tobacco had never smelt so nice. And walking up and down the empty room, he stopped here and there to touch or look. He took up Stella's work-basket, fingered the cotton reels and a gaily-coloured plait of sewing silks, smelt at the little bag filled with woodroffe she kept among them. He sat down at the piano, playing tunes with one finger, thinking: 'To-night she'll play; I shall watch her while she's playing; it does me good to watch her.' He took up the book, which still lay where she had placed it beside him, and tried to read. But Megan's little, sad figure began to come back at once, and he got up and leaned in the window, listening to the thrushes in the Crescent gardens, gazing at the sea, dreamy and blue below the trees. A servant came in and cleared the tea away, and he still stood, inhaling the evening air,

trying not to think. Then he saw the Hallidays coming through the gate of the Crescent, Stella a little in front of Phil and the children, with their baskets, and instinctively he drew back. His heart, too sore and discomfited, shrank from this encounter, yet wanted its friendly solace—bore a grudge against this influence, yet craved its cool innocence, and the pleasure of watching Stella's face. From against the wall behind the piano he saw her come in and stand looking a little blank as though disappointed; then she saw him and smiled, a swift, brilliant smile which warmed yet irritated Ashurst.

"You never came after us, Frank."

"No; I found I couldn't."

"Look! We picked such lovely late violets!" She held out a bunch. Ashurst put his nose to them, and there stirred within him vague longings, chilled instantly by a vision of Megan's anxious face lifted to the faces of the passers-by.

He said shortly: "How jolly!" and turned away. He went up to his room, and, avoiding the children, who were coming up the stairs, threw himself on his bed, and lay there with his arms crossed over his face. Now that he felt the die really cast, and Megan given up, he hated himself, and almost hated the Hallidays and their atmosphere of healthy, happy English homes.

Why should they have chanced here, to drive away first love—to show him that he was going to be no better than a common seducer? What right had Stella, with her fair, shy beauty, to make him know for certain that he would never marry Megan; and, tarnishing it all, bring him such bitterness of regretful longing and such pity? Megan would be back by now, worn out by her miserable seeking—poor little thing!—expecting, perhaps, to find him there when she reached home. Ashurst bit at his sleeve, to stifle a groan of remorseful longing. He went to dinner glum and silent, and his mood threw a dinge even over the children. It was a melancholy, rather ill-tempered evening, for they were all tired; several times he caught Stella looking at him with a hurt, puzzled expression, and this pleased his evil mood. He slept miserably; got up quite early, and wandered out. He went down to the beach. Alone there with the serene, the blue, the sunlit sea, his heart relaxed a little. Conceited fool—to think that Megan would take it so hard! In a week or two she would almost have forgotten! And he—well, he would have the reward of virtue! A good young man! If Stella knew, she would give him her blessing for resisting that devil she believed in; and he uttered a hard laugh. But slowly the peace and beauty of sea and sky, the flight of the

lonely seagulls, made him feel ashamed. He bathed, and turned homewards.

In the Crescent gardens Stella herself was sitting on a camp stool, sketching. He stole up close behind. How fair and pretty she was, bent diligently, holding up her brush, measuring, wrinkling her brows.

He said gently:

"Sorry I was such a beast last night, Stella."

She turned round, startled, flushed very pink, and said in her quick way:

"It's all right. I knew there was something. Between friends it doesn't matter, does it?"

Ashurst answered:

"Between friends—and we are, aren't we?"

She looked up at him, nodded vehemently, and her upper teeth gleamed again in that swift, brilliant smile.

Three days later he went back to London, travelling with the Hallidays. He had not written to the farm. What was there he could say?

On the last day of April in the following year he and Stella were married. . . .

Such were Ashurst's memories, sitting against the wall among the gorse, on his silver-wedding day. At this very spot, where he had laid out the lunch, Megan must have stood outlined against

the sky when he had first caught sight of her. Of all queer coincidences! And there moved in him a longing to go down and see again the farm and the orchard, and the meadow of the gipsy bogle. It would not take long; Stella would be an hour yet, perhaps.

How well he remembered it all—the little crowning group of pine trees, the steep-up grass hill behind! He paused at the farm gate. The low stone house, the yew-tree porch, the flowering currants—not changed a bit; even the old green chair was out there on the grass under the window, where he had reached up to her that night to take the key. Then he turned down the lane, and stood leaning on the orchard gate—grey skeleton of a gate, as then. A black pig even was wandering in there among the trees. Was it true that twenty-six years had passed, or had he dreamed and awakened to find Megan waiting for him by the big apple tree? Unconsciously he put up his hand to his grizzled beard and brought himself back to reality. Opening the gate, he made his way down through the docks and nettles till he came to the edge, and the old apple tree itself. Unchanged! A little more of the grey-green lichen, a dead branch or two, and for the rest it might have been only last night that he had embraced that mossy trunk after Megan's

flight and inhaled its woody savour, while above his head the moonlit blossom had seemed to breathe and live. In that early spring a few buds were showing already; the blackbirds shouting their songs, a cuckoo calling, the sunlight bright and warm. Incredibly the same—the chattering trout-stream, the narrow pool he had lain in every morning, splashing the water over his flanks and chest; and out there in the wild meadow the beech clump and the stone where the gipsy bogle was supposed to sit. And an ache for lost youth, a hankering, a sense of wasted love and sweetness, gripped Ashurst by the throat. Surely, on this earth of such wild beauty, one was meant to hold rapture to one's heart, as this earth and sky held it! And yet, one could not!

He went to the edge of the stream, and looking down at the little pool, thought: 'Youth and spring! What has become of them all, I wonder?' And then, in sudden fear of having this memory jarred by human encounter, he went back to the lane, and pensively retraced his steps to the cross-roads.

Beside the car an old, grey-bearded labourer was leaning on a stick, talking to the chauffeur. He broke off at once, as though guilty of disrespect, and touching his hat, prepared to limp on down the lane.

Ashurst pointed to the narrow green mound. "Can you tell me what this is?"

The old fellow stopped; on his face had come a look as though he were thinking: 'You've come to the right shop, mister!'

"'Tes a grave," he said.

"But why out here?"

The old man smiled. "That's a tale, as yu may say. An' not the first time as I've a-told et—there's plenty folks asks 'bout that bit o' turf. 'Maid's Grave' us calls et, 'ereabouts."

Ashurst held out his pouch. "Have a fill?"

The old man touched his hat again, and slowly filled an old clay pipe. His eyes, looking upward out of a mass of wrinkles and hair, were still quite bright.

"If yu don' mind, zurr, I'll zet down—my leg's 'urtin' a bit to-day." And he sat down on the mound of turf.

"There's always a vlower on this grave. An' 'tain't so very lonesome, neither; brave lot o' folks goes by now, in they new motor cars an' things—not as 'twas in th' old days. She've a got company up 'ere. 'Twas a poor soul killed 'erself."

"I see!" said Ashurst. "Cross-roads burial. I didn't know that custom was kept up."

"Ah! but 'twas a main long time ago. Us 'ad a

parson as was very God-fearin' then. Let me see, I've a 'ad my pension six year come Michaelmas, an' I were just on fifty when t'appened. There's none livin' knows more about et than what I du. She belonged close 'ere; same farm as where I used to work along o' Mrs. Narracombe—'tes Nick Narracombe's now; I dus a bit for 'im still, odd times."

Ashurst, who was leaning against the gate, lighting his pipe, left his curved hands before his face for long after the flame of the match had gone out.

"Yes?" he said, and to himself his voice sounded hoarse and queer.

"She was one in an 'underd, poor maid! I putts a vlower 'ere every time I passes. Pretty maid an' gude maid she was, though they wouldn't burry 'er up tu th' church, nor where she wanted to be burried neither." The old labourer paused, and put his hairy, twisted hand flat down on the turf beside the bluebells.

"Yes?" said Ashurst.

"In a manner of speakin'," the old man went on, "I think as 'twas a love-story—though there's no one never knu for zartin. Yu can't tell what's in a maid's 'ead—but that's wot I think about it." He drew his hand along the turf. "I was fond o' that maid—don' know as there was

anyone as wasn' fond of 'er. But she was tu lovin'-'earted—that's where 'twas, I think." He looked up. And Ashurst, whose lips were trembling in the cover of his beard, murmured again: "Yes?"

"'Twas in the spring, 'bout now as 't might be, or a little later—blossom time—an' we 'ad one o' they young college gentlemen stayin' at the farm—nice feller tu, with 'is 'ead in the air. I liked 'e very well, an' I never see nothin' between 'em, but to my thinkin' 'e turned the maid's fancy." The old man took the pipe out of his mouth, spat, and went on:

"Yu see, 'e went away sudden one day, an' never come back. They got 'is knapsack and bits o' things down there still. That's what stuck in my mind—'is never sendin' for 'em. 'Is name was Ashes, or somethen' like that."

"Yes?" said Ashurst once more.

The old man licked his lips.

"'Er never said nothin', but from that day 'er went kind of dazed lukin'; didn' seem rightly therr at all. I never knu a 'uman creature so changed in me life—never. There was another young feller at the farm—Joe Biddaford 'is name wer', that was praaperly sweet on 'er, tu; I guess 'e used to plague 'er wi' 'is attentions. She got to luke quite wild. I'd zee her sometimes of an avenin' when I

was bringin' up the calves; ther' she'd stand in th' orchard, under the big apple tree, lukin' straight before 'er. 'Well,' I used t'think, 'I dunno what 'tes that's the matter wi' yu, but yu'm lukin' pittiful, that yu be!'"

The old man relit his pipe, and sucked at it reflectively.

"Yes?" said Ashurst.

"I remembers one day I said to 'er: 'What's the matter, Megan?'—'er name was Megan David, she come from Wales same as 'er aunt, ol' Missis Narracombe. 'Yu'm frettin' about somethin', I says. 'No, Jim,' she says, 'I'm not frettin'.' 'Yes, yu be!' I says. 'No,' she says, and tu tears cam' rollin' out. 'Yu'm cryin'—what's that, then?' I says. She putts 'er 'and over 'er 'eart: 'It 'urts me,' she says; 'but 'twill sune be better,' she says. 'But if anything shude 'appen to me, Jim, I wants to be burried under this 'ere apple tree.' I laughed. 'What's goin' to 'appen to yu?' I says; 'don't 'ee be fulish.' 'No,' she says, 'I won't be fulish.' Well, I know what maids are, an' I never thought no more about et, till tu days arter that, 'bout six in the avenin' I was comin' up wi' the calves, when I see somethin' dark lyin' in the strame, close to that big apple tree. I says to meself: 'Is that a pig—funny place for a pig to get to!' an' I goes up to et, an' I see what 'twas."

The old man stopped; his eyes, turned upward, had a bright, suffering look.

"'Twas the maid, in a little narrer pool ther' that's made by the stoppin' of a rock—where I see the young gentleman bathin' once or twice. 'Er was lyin' on 'er face in the watter. There was a plant o' goldie-cups growin' out o' the stone just above 'er 'ead. An' when I come to luke at 'er face, 'twas luvly, butiful, so calm's a baby's—wonderful butiful et was. When the doctor saw 'er, 'e said: ''Er culdn' never a-done it in that little bit o' watter ef' er 'adn't a-been in an extarsy.' Ah! an' judgin' from 'er face, that was just 'ow she was. Et made me cry praaper—butiful et was! 'Twas June then, but she'd a-found a little bit of apple-blossom left over somewheres, and stuck et in 'er 'air. That's why I thinks 'er must a-been in an extarsy, to go to et gay, like that. Why! there wasn't more than a fute and 'arf o' watter. But I tell 'ee one thing—that meadder's 'arnted; I knu et, an' she knu et; an' no one'll persuade me as 'tesn't. I told 'em what she said to me 'bout bein' burried under th' apple tree. But I think that turned 'em—made et luke tu much 's ef she'd 'ad it in 'er mind deliberate; an' so they burried 'er up 'ere. Parson we 'ad then was very particular, 'e was."

Again the old man drew his hand over the turf.

"'Tes wonderful, et seems," he added slowly, "what maids 'll du for love. She 'ad a lovin' 'eart; I guess 'twas broken. But us never *knu* nothin'!"

He looked up as if for approval of his story, but Ashurst had walked past him as if he were not there.

Up on the top of the hill, beyond where he had spread the lunch, over, out of sight, he lay down on his face. So had his virtue been rewarded, and "the Cyprian," goddess of love, taken her revenge! And before his eyes, dim with tears, came Megan's face with the sprig of apple blossom in her dark, wet hair. 'What did I do that was wrong?' he thought. 'What *did* I do?' But he could not answer. Spring, with its rush of passion, its flowers and song—the spring in his heart and Megan's! Was it just Love seeking a victim! The Greek was right, then—the words of the "Hippolytus" as true to-day!

"For mad is the heart of Love,
And gold the gleam of his wing;
And all to the spell thereof
Bend when he makes his spring.
All life that is wild and young
In mountain and wave and stream
All that of earth is sprung,
Or breathes in the red sunbeam;
Yea, and Mankind. O'er all a royal throne,
Cyprian, Cyprian, is thine alone!"

The Greek was right! Megan! Poor little Megan —coming over the hill! Megan under the old apple tree waiting and looking! Megan dead, with beauty printed on her! . . .

A voice said:

"Oh, there you are! Look!"

Ashurst rose, took his wife's sketch, and stared at it in silence.

"Is the foreground right, Frank?"

"Yes."

"But there's something wanting, isn't there?"

Ashurst nodded. Wanting? The apple tree, the singing, and the gold!

1916.

THE JURYMAN

I

"Don't you see, brother, I was reading yesterday the Gospel about Christ, the little Father; how He suffered, how He walked on the earth. I suppose you have heard about it?"

"Indeed, I have," replied Stepanuitch; "but we are people in darkness; we can't read."—TOLSTOI.

MR. HENRY BOSENGATE, of the London Stock Exchange, seated himself in his car that morning during the great war with a sense of injury. Major in a Volunteer Corps; member of all the local committees; lending this very car to the neighbouring hospital, at times even driving it himself for their benefit; subscribing to funds, so far as his diminished income permitted—he was conscious of being an asset to the country, and one whose time could not be wasted with impunity. To be summoned to sit on a jury at the local assizes, and not even the grand jury at that! It was in the nature of an outrage.

Strong and upright, with hazel eyes and dark eyebrows, pinkish-brown cheeks, a forehead white, well-shaped, and getting high, with grey-

ish hair glossy and well-brushed, and a trim moustache, he might have been taken for that colonel of Volunteers which indeed he was in a fair way of becoming.

His wife had followed him out under the porch, and stood bracing her supple body clothed in lilac linen. Red rambler roses formed a sort of crown to her dark head; her ivory-coloured face had in it just a suggestion of the Japanese.

Mr. Bosengate spoke through the whirr of the engine:

"I don't expect to be late, dear. This business is ridiculous. There oughtn't to *be* any crime in these days."

His wife—her name was Kathleen—smiled. She looked very pretty and cool, Mr. Bosengate thought. To one bound on this dull and stuffy business everything he owned seemed pleasant—the geranium beds beside the gravel drive, his long, red-brick house mellowing decorously in its creepers and ivy, the little clock-tower over stables now converted to a garage, the dovecote, masking at the other end the conservatory which adjoined the billiard-room. Close to the red-brick lodge his two children, Kate and Harry, ran out from under the acacia trees, and waved to him, scrambling bare-legged on to the low, red, ivy-covered wall which guarded his domain of eleven

acres. Mr. Bosengate waved back, thinking: 'Jolly couple—by Jove, they are!' Above their heads, through the trees, he could see right away to some Downs, faint in the July heat haze. And he thought: 'Pretty a spot as one could have got, so close to Town!'

Despite the war he had enjoyed these last two years more than any of the ten since he built "Charmleigh" and settled down to semi-rural domesticity with his young wife. There had been a certain piquancy, a savour added to existence, by the country's peril, and all the public service and sacrifice it demanded. His chauffeur was gone, and one gardener did the work of three. He enjoyed—positively enjoyed, his committee work; even the serious decline of business and increase of taxation had not much worried one continually conscious of the national crisis and his own part therein. The country had wanted waking up, wanted a lesson in effort and economy; and the feeling that he had not spared himself in these strenuous times, had given a zest to those quiet pleasures of bed and board which, at his age, even the most patriotic could retain with a good conscience. He had denied himself many things—new clothes, presents for Kathleen and the children, travel, and that pine-apple house which he had been on the point of building when

the war broke out; new wine, too, and cigars, and membership of the two Clubs which he had never used in the old days. The hours had seemed fuller and longer, sleep better earned—wonderful, the things one could do without when put to it! He turned the car into the high road, driving dreamily for he was in plenty of time. The war was going pretty well now; he was no fool optimist, but now that conscription was in force, one might reasonably hope for its end within a year. Then there would be a boom, and one might let oneself go a little. Visions of theatres and supper with his wife at the Savoy afterwards, and cosy night drives back into the sweet-smelling country behind your own chauffeur once more teased a fancy which even now did not soar beyond the confines of domestic pleasures. He pictured his wife in new dresses by Jay—she was fifteen years younger than himself, and "paid for dressing" as they said. He had always delighted—as men older than their wives will—in the admiration she excited from others not privileged to enjoy her charms. Her rather queer and ironical beauty, her cool irreproachable wifeliness, was a constant balm to him. They would give dinner parties again, have their friends down from town, and he would once more enjoy sitting at the foot of the dinner table while Kathleen sat at the head,

with the light soft on her ivory shoulders, behind flowers she had arranged in that original way of hers, and fruit which he had grown in his hot-houses; once more he would take legitimate interest in the wine he offered to his guests —once more stock that Chinese cabinet wherein he kept cigars. Yes—there was a certain satisfaction in these days of privation, if only from the anticipation they created.

The sprinkling of villas had become continuous on either side of the high road; and women going out to shop, tradesmen's boys delivering victuals, young men in khaki, began to abound. Now and then a limping or bandaged form would pass—some bit of human wreckage; and Mr. Bosengate would think mechanically: 'Another of those poor devils! Wonder if we've had his case before us!'

Running his car into the best hotel garage of the little town, he made his way leisurely over to the court. It stood back from the market-place, and was already lapped by a sea of persons having, as in the outer ring at race meetings, an air of business at which one must not be caught out, together with a soaked or flushed appearance. Mr. Bosengate could not resist putting his handkerchief to his nose. He had carefully drenched it with lavender water, and to this fact owed, per-

haps, his immunity from the post of foreman on the jury—for, say what you will about the English, they have a deep instinct for affairs.

He found himself second in the front row of the jury box, and through the odour of "Sanitas" gazed at the judge's face expressionless up there, for all the world like a bewigged bust. His fellows in the box had that appearance of falling between two classes characteristic of jurymen. Mr. Bosengate was not impressed. On one side of him the foreman sat, a prominent upholsterer, known in the town as "Gentleman Fox." His dark and beautifully brushed and oiled hair and moustache, his radiant linen, gold watch and chain, the white piping to his waistcoat, and a habit of never saying "Sir" had long marked him out from commoner men; he undertook to bury people too, to save them trouble; and was altogether superior. On the other side Mr. Bosengate had one of those men, who, except when they sit on juries, are never seen without a little brown bag, and the appearance of having been interrupted in a drink. Pale and shiny, with large loose eyes shifting from side to side, he had an underdone voice and uneasy flabby hands. Mr. Bosengate disliked sitting next to him. Beyond this commercial traveller sat a dark pale young man with spectacles; beyond him again, a short old man

with grey moustache, mutton chops, and innumerable wrinkles; and the front row was completed by a chemist. The three immediately behind, Mr. Bosengate did not thoroughly master; but the three at the end of the second row he learned in their order of an oldish man in a grey suit, given to winking; an inanimate person with the mouth of a moustachioed cod-fish, over whose long bald crown three wisps of damp hair were carefully arranged; and a dried, dapperish, clean-shorn man, whose mouth seemed terrified lest it should be surprised without a smile. Their first and second verdicts were recorded without the necessity for withdrawal, and Mr. Bosengate was already sleepy when the third case was called. The sight of khaki revived his drooping attention. But what a weedy-looking specimen! This prisoner had a truly nerveless pitiable dejected air. If he had ever had a military bearing it had shrunk into him during his confinement. His ill-shaped brown tunic, whose little brass buttons seemed trying to keep smiling, struck Mr. Bosengate as ridiculously short, used though he was to such things. 'Absurd,' he thought—'Lumbago! Just where they ought to be covered!' Then the officer and gentleman stirred in him, and he added to himself: 'Still, there must be some distinction made!' The little soldier's visage had once per-

haps been tanned, but was now the colour of dark dough; his large brown eyes with white showing below the iris, as so often in the eyes of very nervous people—wandered from face to face, of judge, counsel, jury, and public. There were hollows in his cheeks, his dark hair looked damp; around his neck he wore a bandage. The commercial traveller on Mr. Bosengate's left turned, and whispered: "*Felo de se!* My hat! what a guy!" Mr. Bosengate pretended not to hear—he could not bear that fellow!—and slowly wrote on a bit of paper: "Owen Lewis." Welsh! Well, he looked it—not at all an English face. Attempted suicide—not at all an English crime! Suicide implied surrender, a putting-up of hands to Fate—to say nothing of the religious aspect of the matter. And suicide in khaki seemed to Mr. Bosengate particularly abhorrent; like turning tail in face of the enemy; almost meriting the fate of a deserter. He looked at the prisoner, trying not to give way to this prejudice. And the prisoner seemed to look at him, though this, perhaps, was fancy.

The Counsel for the prosecution, a little, alert, grey, decided man, above military age, began detailing the circumstances of the crime. Mr. Bosengate, though not particularly sensitive to atmosphere, could perceive a sort of current run-

ning through the Court. It was as if jury and public were thinking rhythmically in obedience to the same unexpressed prejudice of which he himself was conscious. Even the Cæsar-like pale face up there, presiding, seemed in its ironic serenity responding to that current.

"Gentlemen of the jury, before I call my evidence, I direct your attention to the bandage the accused is still wearing. He gave himself this wound with his Army razor, adding, if I may say so, insult to the injury he was inflicting on his country. He pleads not guilty; and before the magistrates he said that absence from his wife was preying on his mind"—the advocate's close lips widened—"Well, gentlemen, if such an excuse is to weigh with us in these days, I'm sure I don't know what's to happen to the Empire."

'No, by George!' thought Mr. Bosengate.

The evidence of the first witness, a room-mate who had caught the prisoner's hand, and of the sergeant, who had at once been summoned, was conclusive and he began to cherish a hope that they would get through without withdrawing, and he would be home before five. But then a hitch occurred. The regimental doctor failed to respond when his name was called; and the judge having for the first time that day showed himself

capable of human emotion, intimated that he would adjourn until the morrow.

Mr. Bosengate received the announcement with equanimity. He would be home even earlier! And gathering up the sheets of paper he had scribbled on, he put them in his pocket and got up. The would-be suicide was being taken out of the court—a shambling drab figure with shoulders hunched. What good were men like that in these days! What good! The prisoner looked up. Mr. Bosengate encountered in full the gaze of those large brown eyes, with the white showing underneath. What a suffering, wretched, pitiful face! A man had no business to give you a look like that! The prisoner passed on down the stairs, and vanished. Mr. Bosengate went out and across the market place to the garage of the hotel where he had left his car. The sun shone fiercely and he thought: 'I must do some watering in the garden.' He brought the car out, and was about to start the engine, when someone passing said: "Good evenin'. Seedy-lookin' beggar that last prisoner, ain't he? We don't want men of that stamp." It was his neighbour on the jury, the commercial traveller, in a straw hat, with a little brown bag already in his hand and the froth of an interrupted drink on his moustache. Answering curtly: "Good evening!" and thinking: 'Nor of

yours, my friend!' Mr. Bosengate started the car with unnecessary clamour. But as if brought back to life by the commercial traveller's remark, the prisoner's figure seemed to speed along too, turning up at Mr. Bosengate his pitifully unhappy eyes. Want of his wife!—queer excuse that for trying to put it out of his power ever to see her again! Why! Half a loaf, even a slice, was better than no bread. Not many of that neurotic type in the Army—thank Heaven! The lugubrious figure vanished, and Mr. Bosengate pictured instead the form of his own wife bending over her "Gloire de Dijon roses" in the rosery, where she generally worked a little before tea now that they were short of gardeners. He saw her, as often he had seen her, raise herself and stand, head to one side, a gloved hand on her slender hip, gazing as it were ironically from under drooped lids at buds which did not come out fast enough. And the word '*Caline*,' for he was something of a French scholar, shot through his mind: 'Kathleen—*Caline!*' If he found her there when he got in, he would steal up on the grass and—ah! but with great care not to crease her dress or disturb her hair! 'If only she weren't quite so self-contained,' he thought; 'It's like a cat you can't get near, not really near!'

The car, returning faster than it had come

down that morning, had already passed the outskirt villas, and was breasting the hill to where, among fields and the old trees, Charmleigh lay apart from commoner life. Turning into his drive, Mr. Bosengate thought with a certain surprise: 'I wonder what she *does* think of! I wonder!' He put his gloves and hat down in the outer hall and went into the lavatory, to dip his face in cool water and wash it with sweet-smelling soap—delicious revenge on the unclean atmosphere in which he had been stewing so many hours. He came out again into the hall dazed by soap and the mellowed light, and a voice from half-way up the stairs said: "Daddy! Look!" His little daughter was standing up there with one hand on the banisters. She scrambled on to them and came sliding down, her frock up to her eyes, and her holland knickers to her middle. Mr. Bosengate said mildly:

"Well, that's elegant!"

"Tea's in the summer-house. Mummy's waiting. Come on!"

With her hand in his, Mr. Bosengate went on, through the drawing-room, long and cool, with sun-blinds down, through the billiard-room, high and cool, through the conservatory, green and sweet-smelling, out on to the terrace and the upper lawn. He had never felt such sheer exhila-

rated joy in his home surroundings, so cool, glistening and green under the July sun; and he said:

"Well, Kit, what have you all been doing?"

"I've fed my rabbits and Harry's; and we've been in the attic; Harry got his leg through the skylight."

Mr. Bosengate drew in his breath with a hiss.

"It's all right, Daddy; we got it out again, it's only grazed the skin. And we've been making swabs—I made seventeen, Mummy made thirty-three, and then she went to the hospital. Did you put many men in prison?"

Mr. Bosengate cleared his throat. The question seemed to him untimely.

"Only two."

"What's it like in prison, Daddy?"

Mr. Bosengate, who had no more knowledge than his little daughter, replied in an absent voice:

"Not very nice."

They were passing under a young oak tree, where the path wound round to the rosery and summer-house. Something shot down and clawed Mr. Bosengate's neck. His little daughter began to hop and suffocate with laughter.

"Oh, Daddy! Aren't you caught! I led you on purpose!"

Looking up, Mr. Bosengate saw his small son

lying along a low branch above him—like the leopard he was declaring himself to be (for fear of error), and thought blithely: 'What an active little chap it is!'

"Let me drop on your shoulders, Daddy—like they do on the deer."

"Oh, yes! Do be a deer, Daddy!"

Mr. Bosengate did not see being a deer; his hair had just been brushed. But he entered the rosery buoyantly between his offspring. His wife was standing precisely as he had imagined her, in a pale blue frock open at the neck, with a narrow black band round the waist, and little accordion pleats below. She looked her coolest. Her smile, when she turned her head, hardly seemed to take Mr. Bosengate seriously enough. He placed his lips below one of her half-drooped eyelids. She even smelled of roses. His children began to dance round their mother, and Mr. Bosengate, firmly held between them, was also compelled to do this, until she said:

"When you've quite done, let's have tea!"

It was not the greeting he had imagined coming along in the car. Earwigs were plentiful in the summer-house—used perhaps twice a year, but indispensable to every country residence—and Mr. Bosengate was not sorry for the excuse to get out again. Though all was so pleasant, he felt

oddly restless, rather suffocated; and lighting his pipe, began to move about among the roses, blowing tobacco at the greenfly; in war-time one was never quite idle! And suddenly he said:

"We're trying a wretched Tommy at the assizes."

His wife looked up from a rose.

"What for?"

"Attempted suicide."

"Why did he?"

"Can't stand the separation from his wife."

She looked at him, gave a low laugh, and said:

"Oh dear!"

Mr. Bosengate was puzzled. Why did she laugh? He looked round, saw that the children were gone, took his pipe from his mouth, and approached her.

"You look very pretty," he said. "Give me a kiss!"

His wife bent her body forward from the waist, and pushed her lips out till they touched his moustache. Mr. Bosengate felt a sensation as if he had arisen from breakfast, without having eaten marmalade. He mastered it, and said:

"That jury are a rum lot."

His wife's eyelids flickered. "I wish women sat on juries."

"Why?"

"It would be an experience."

Not the first time she had used that curious expression! Yet her life was far from dull, so far as he could see; with the new interests created by the war, and the constant calls on her time made by the perfection of their home life, she had a useful and busy existence. Again the random thought passed through him: 'But she never tells me anything!' And suddenly that lugubrious khaki-clad figure started up among the rose bushes. "We've got a lot to be thankful for!" he said abruptly. "I must go to work!" His wife, raising one eyebrow, smiled. "And I to weep!" Mr. Bosengate laughed—she had a pretty wit! And stroking his comely moustache where it had been kissed, he moved out into the sunshine. All the evening, throughout his labours, not inconsiderable, for this jury business had put him behind time, he was afflicted by that restless pleasure in his surroundings; would break off in mowing the lower lawn to look at the house through the trees; would leave his study and committee papers, to cross into the drawing-room and sniff its dainty fragrance; paid a special good-night visit to the children having supper in the schoolroom; pottered in and out from his dressing room to admire his wife while she was changing for dinner; dined with his mind perpetually on

the next course; talked volubly of the war; and in the billiard room afterwards, smoking the pipe which had taken the place of his cigar, could not keep still, but roamed about, now in conservatory, now in the drawing-room, where his wife and the governess were still making swabs. It seemed to him that he could not have enough of anything. About eleven o'clock he strolled out—beautiful night, only just dark enough—under the new arrangement with Time—and went down to the little round fountain below the terrace. His wife was playing the piano. Mr. Bosengate looked at the water and the flat dark water-lily leaves which floated there; looked up at the house, where only narrow chinks of light showed, because of the Lighting Order. The dreamy music drifted out; there was a scent of heliotrope. He moved a few steps back, and sat in the children's swing under an old lime tree. Jolly—blissful—in the warm, bloomy dark! Of all hours of the day, this before going to bed was perhaps the pleasantest. He saw the light go up in his wife's bedroom, unscreened for a full minute, and thought: 'Aha! If I did my duty as a special, I should "strafe" her for that.' She came to the window, her figure lighted, hands up to the back of her head, so that her bare arms gleamed. Mr. Bosengate wafted her a kiss, knowing he could not be

seen. 'Lucky chap!' he mused; 'she's a great joy!' Up went her arm, down came the blind—the house was dark again. He drew a long breath. 'Another ten minutes,' he thought, 'then I'll go in and shut up. By Jove! The limes are beginning to smell already!' And, the better to take in that acme of his well-being, he tilted the swing, lifted his feet from the ground, and swung himself toward the scented blossoms. He wanted to whelm his senses in their perfume, and closed his eyes. But instead of the domestic vision he expected, the face of the little Welsh soldier, hare-eyed, shadowy, pinched and dark and pitiful, started up with such disturbing vividness that he opened his eyes again at once. Curse! The fellow almost haunted one! Where would he be now—poor little devil!—lying in his cell, thinking—thinking of his wife! Feeling suddenly morbid, Mr. Bosengate arrested the swing and stood up. Absurd!—all his well-being and mood of warm anticipation had deserted him! 'A d——d world!' he thought. 'Such a lot of misery! Why should I have to sit in judgment on that poor beggar, and condemn him?' He moved up on to the terrace and walked briskly, to rid himself of this disturbance before going in. 'That commercial traveller chap,' he thought, 'the rest of those fellows—they see nothing!' And, abruptly turning

up the three stone steps, he entered the conservatory, locked it, passed into the billiard room, and drank his barley water. One of the pictures was hanging crooked; he went up to put it straight. Still life. Grapes and apples, and—lobsters! They struck him as odd for the first time. Why lobsters? The whole picture seemed dead and oily. He turned off the light, and went upstairs, passed his wife's door, into his own room, and undressed. Clothed in his pyjamas he opened the door between the rooms. By the light coming from his own he could see her dark head on the pillow. Was she asleep? No—not asleep, certainly. The moment of fruition had come; the crowning of his pride and pleasure in his home. But he continued to stand there. He had suddenly no pride, no pleasure, no desire; nothing but a sort of dull resentment against everything. He turned back; shut the door, and slipping between the heavy curtains and his open window, stood looking out at the night. 'Full of misery!' he thought. 'Full of d——d misery!'

II

Filing into the jury box next morning, Mr. Bosengate collided slightly with a short juryman, whose square figure and square head of stiff yellow-red hair he had only vaguely noticed the

day before. The man looked angry, and Mr. Bosengate thought: 'An ill-bred dog, that!'

He sat down quickly, and, to avoid further recognition of his fellows, gazed in front of him. His appearance on Saturdays was always military, by reason of the route march of his Volunteer Corps in the afternoon. Gentleman Fox, who belonged to the corps too, was also looking square; but that commercial traveller on his other side seemed more *louche*, and as if surprised in immorality, than ever; only the proximity of Gentleman Fox on the other side kept Mr. Bosengate from shrinking. Then he saw the prisoner being brought in, shadowy and dark behind the brightness of his buttons, and he experienced a sort of shock, this figure was so exactly that which had several times started up in his mind. Somehow he had expected a fresh sight of the fellow to dispel and disprove what had been haunting him, had expected to find him just an outside phenomenon, not, as it were, a part of his own life. And he gazed at the carven immobility of the judge's face, trying to steady himself, as a drunken man will, by looking at a light. The regimental doctor, unabashed by the judge's comment on his absence the day before, gave his evidence like a man who had better things to do, and the case for the prosecution was forthwith

rounded in by a little speech from counsel. The matter—he said—was clear as daylight. Those who wore His Majesty's uniform, charged with the responsibility and privilege of defending their country, were no more entitled to desert their regiments by taking their own lives than they were entitled to desert in any other way. He asked for a conviction. Mr. Bosengate felt a sympathetic shuffle passing through all feet; the judge was speaking:

"Prisoner, you can either go into the witness box and make your statement on oath, in which case you may be cross-examined on it; or you can make your statement there from the dock, in which case you will not be cross-examined. Which do you elect to do?"

"From here, my lord."

Seeing him now full face, and, as it might be, come to life in the effort to convey his feelings, Mr. Bosengate had suddenly a quite different impression of the fellow. It was as if his khaki had fallen off, and he had stepped out of his own shadow, a live and quivering creature. His pinched clean-shaven face seemed to have an irregular, wilder, hairier look, his large nervous brown eyes darkened and glowed; he jerked his shoulders, his arms, his whole body, like a man suddenly freed from cramp or a suit of armour.

He spoke, too, in a quick, crisp, rather high voice, pinching his consonants a little, sharpening his vowels, like a true Welshman.

"My lord and misters the jury," he said: "I was a hairdresser when the call came on me to join the army. I had a little home and a wife. I never thought what it would be like to be away from them, I surely never did; and I'm ashamed to be speaking it out like this—how it can squeeze and squeeze a man, how it can prey on your mind, when you're nervous like I am. 'Tis not everyone that cares for his home—there's lots o' them never wants to see their wives again. But for me 'tis like being shut up in a cage, it is!" Mr. Bosengate saw daylight between the skinny fingers of the man's hand thrown out with a jerk. "I cannot bear it shut up away from wife and home like what you are in the army. So when I took my razor that morning I was wild—an' I wouldn't be here now but for that man catching my hand. There was no reason in it, I'm willing to confess. It was foolish; but wait till you get feeling like what I was, and see how it draws you. Misters the jury, don't send me back to prison; it is worse still there. If you have wives you will know what it is like for lots of us; only some is more nervous than others. I swear to you, sirs, I could not help it——" Again the little man flung

out his hand, his whole thin body shook and Mr. Bosengate felt the same sensation as when he drove his car over a dog—"Misters the jury, I hope you may never in your lives feel as I've been feeling."

The little man ceased, his eyes shrank back into their sockets, his figure back into its mask of shadowy brown and gleaming buttons, and Mr. Bosengate was conscious that the judge was making a series of remarks; and, very soon, of being seated at a mahogany table in the jury's withdrawing room, hearing the voice of the man with hair like an Irish terrier's saying: "Didn't he talk through his hat, that little blighter!" Conscious, too, of the commercial traveller, still on his left—always on his left!—mopping his brow, and muttering: "Phew! It's hot in there to-day!" while an effluvium, as of an inside accustomed to whisky came from him. Then the man with the underlip and the three plastered wisps of hair said:

"Don't know why we withdrew, Mr. Foreman!"

Mr. Bosengate looked round to where, at the head of the table, Gentleman Fox sat, in defensive gentility and the little white piping to his waistcoat. "I shall be happy to take the sense of the jury"; he was saying blandly.

There was a short silence, then the chemist murmured:

"I should say he must have what they call claustrophobia."

"Clauster fiddlesticks! The feller's a shirker, that's all. Missed his wife—pretty excuse! Indecent, I call it!"

The speaker was the little wire-haired man; and emotion, deep and angry, stirred in Mr. Bosengate. That ill-bred little cur! He gripped the edge of the table with both hands.

"I think it's d——d natural!" he muttered. But almost before the words had left his lips he felt dismay. What had he said—he, nearly a colonel of volunteers—endorsing such a want of patriotism! And hearing the commercial traveller murmuring: "'Ear, 'ear!" he reddened violently.

The wire-headed man said roughly:

"There's too many of these blighted shirkers, and too much pampering of them."

The turmoil in Mr. Bosengate increased; he remarked in an icy voice:

"I agree to no verdict that'll send the man back to prison."

At this a real tremor seemed to go round the table, as if they all saw themselves sitting there through lunch time. Then the large grey-haired man given to winking, said:

"Oh! Come, sir—after what the judge said! Come, sir! What do you say, Mr. Foreman?"

Gentleman Fox—as who should say 'This is excellent value, but I don't wish to press it on you!'—answered:

"We are only concerned with the facts. Did he or did he not try to shorten his life?"

"Of course he did—said so himself," Mr. Bosengate heard the wire-haired man snap out, and from the following murmur of assent he alone abstained. Guilty! Well—yes! There was no way out of admitting that, but his feelings revolted against handing "that poor little beggar" over to the tender mercy of his country's law. His whole soul rose in arms against agreeing with that ill-bred little cur, and the rest of this job-lot. He had an impulse to get up and walk out, saying: "Settle it your own way. Good-morning."

"It seems, sir," Gentleman Fox was saying, "that we're all agreed to guilty, except yourself. If you will allow me, I don't see how you can go behind what the prisoner himself admitted."

Thus brought up to the very guns, Mr. Bosengate, red in the face, thrust his hands deep into the side pockets of his tunic, and, staring straight before him, said:

"Very well; on condition we recommend him to mercy."

"What do you say, gentlemen; shall we recommend him to mercy?"

"'Ear, 'ear!" burst from the commercial traveller, and from the chemist came the murmur:

"No harm in that."

"Well, I think there is. They shoot deserters at the front, and we let this fellow off. I'd hang the cur."

Mr. Bosengate stared at that little wire-haired brute. "Haven't you *any* feeling for others?" he wanted to say. "Can't you see that this poor devil suffers tortures?" But the sheer impossibility of doing this before ten other men brought a slight sweat out on his face and hands; and in agitation he smote the table a blow with his fist. The effect was instantaneous. Everybody looked at the wire-haired man, as if saying: "Yes, you've gone a bit too far there!" The "little brute" stood it for a moment, then muttered surlily:

"Well, commend 'im to mercy if you like; I don't care."

"That's right; they never pay any attention to it," said the grey-haired man, winking heartily. And Mr. Bosengate filed back with the others into court.

But when from the jury box his eyes fell once more on the hare-eyed figure in the dock, he had his worst moment yet. Why should this poor wretch suffer so—for no fault, no fault; while he, and these others, and that snapping counsel, and the Cæsar-like judge up there, went off to their women and their homes, blithe as bees, and probably never thought of him again? And suddenly he was conscious of the judge's voice:

"You will go back to your regiment, and endeavour to serve your country with better spirit. You may thank the jury that you are not sent to prison, and your good fortune that you were not at the front when you tried to commit this cowardly act. You are lucky to be alive."

A policeman pulled the little soldier by the arm; his drab figure with eyes fixed and lustreless, passed down and away. From his very soul Mr. Bosengate wanted to lean out and say: "Cheer up, cheer up! *I* understand."

It was nearly ten o'clock that evening before he reached home, motoring back from the route march. His physical tiredness was abated, for he had partaken of a snack and a whisky and soda at the hotel; but mentally he was in a curious mood. His body felt appeased, his spirit hungry. Tonight he had a yearning, not for his wife's kisses, but for her understanding. He wanted to go to

her and say: "I've learnt a lot to-day—found out things I never thought of. Life's a wonderful thing, Kate, a thing one can't live all to oneself; a thing one shares with everybody, so that when another suffers, one suffers too. It's come to me that what one *has* doesn't matter a bit—it's what one does, and how one sympathises with other people. It came to me in the most extraordinary vivid way, when I was on that jury, watching that poor little rat of a soldier in his trap; it's the first time I've ever felt—the—the spirit of Christ, you know. It's a wonderful thing, Kate—wonderful! We haven't been close—really close, you and I, so that we each understand what the other is feeling. It's all in that, you know; understanding—sympathy—it's priceless. When I saw that poor little devil taken down and sent back to his regiment to begin his sorrows all over again—wanting his wife, thinking and thinking of her just as you know I would be thinking and wanting you, I felt what an awful outside sort of life we lead, never telling each other what we really think and feel, never being really close. I daresay that little chap and his wife keep nothing from each other—live each other's lives. That's what *we* ought to do. Let's get to feeling that what really matters is—understanding and loving, and not only just saying it as we all do, those fellows

on the jury, and even that poor devil of a judge—what an awful life judging one's fellow-creatures! When I left that poor little Tommy this morning, and ever since, I've longed to get back here quietly to you and tell you about it, and make a beginning. There's something wonderful in this, and I want you to feel it as I do, because you mean such a lot to me."

This was what he wanted to say to his wife, not touching, or kissing her, just looking into her eyes, watching them soften and glow as they surely must, catching the infection of his new ardour. And he felt unsteady, fearfully unsteady with the desire to say it all as it should be said: swiftly, quietly, with the truth and fervour of his feeling.

The hall was not lit up, for daylight still lingered under the new arrangement. He went towards the drawing-room, but from the very door shied off to his study and stood irresolute under the picture of a "Man catching a flea" (Dutch school), which had come down to him from his father. The governess would be in there with his wife! He must wait. Essential to go straight to Kathleen and pour it all out, or he would never do it. He felt as nervous as an undergraduate going up for his *vivâ voce*. This thing was so big, so astoundingly and unexpectedly important. He

was suddenly afraid of his wife, afraid of her coolness and her grace, and that something Japanese about her—of all those attributes he had been accustomed to admire most; afraid, as it were, of her attraction. He felt young to-night, almost boyish; would she see that he was not really fifteen years older than herself, and she not really a part of his collection, of all the admirable appointments of his home; but a companion spirit to one who wanted a companion badly. In this agitation of his soul he could keep still no more than he could last night in the agitation of his senses; and he wandered into the dining-room. A dainty supper was set out there, sandwiches, and cake, whisky and the cigarettes—even an early peach. Mr. Bosengate looked at this peach with sorrow rather than disgust. The perfection of it was of a piece with all that had gone before this new and sudden feeling. Its delicious bloom seemed to heighten his perception of the hedge around him, that hedge of the things he so enjoyed, carefully planted and tended these many years. He passed it by uneaten, and went to the window. Out there all was darkening, the fountain, the lime tree, the flower-beds, and the fields below, with the Jersey cows who would come to your call; darkening slowly, losing form, blurring into soft blackness, vanishing, but there none the less—

all there—the hedge of his possessions. He heard the door of the drawing-room open, the voices of his wife and the governess in the hall, going up to bed. If only they didn't look in here! If only——! The voices ceased. He was safe now—had but to follow in a few minutes, to make sure of Kathleen alone. He turned round and stared down the length of the dark dining-room, over the rose-wood table, to where in the mirror above the sideboard at the far end, his figure bathed, a stain, a mere blurred shadow; he made his way down to it along the table edge, and stood before himself as close as he could get. His throat and the roof of his mouth felt dry with nervousness; he put out his finger and touched his face in the glass. 'You're an ass!' he thought. 'Pull yourself together, and get it over. She will see; of course she will!' He swallowed, smoothed his moustache, and walked out. Going up the stairs, his heart beat painfully; but he was in for it now, and marched straight into her room.

Dressed only in a loose blue wrapper, she was brushing her dark hair before the glass. Mr. Bosengate went up to her and stood there silent, looking down. The words he had thought of were like a swarm of bees buzzing in his head, yet not one would fly from between his lips. His wife went on brushing her hair under the light which

shone on her polished elbows. She looked up at him from beneath one lifted eyebrow.

"Well, dear—tired?"

With a sort of vehemence the single word "No" passed out. A faint, a quizzical smile flitted over her face; she shrugged her shoulders ever so gently. That gesture—he had seen it before! And in desperate desire to make her understand, he put his hand on her lifted arm.

"Kathleen, stop—listen to me!" His fingers tightened in his agitation and eagerness to make his great discovery known. But before he could get out a word he became conscious of that cool round arm, conscious of her eyes half-closed, sliding round at him, of her half-smiling lips, of her neck under the wrapper. And he stammered:

"I want—I must—Kathleen, I——"

She lifted her shoulders again in that little shrug. "Yes—I know; all right!"

A wave of heat and shame, and of God knows what came over Mr. Bosengate; he fell on his knees and pressed his forehead to her arm; and he was silent, more silent than the grave. Nothing—nothing came from him but two long sighs. Suddenly he felt her hand stroke his cheek—compassionately, it seemed to him. She made a little movement towards him; her lips met his, and he remembered nothing but that . . .

In his own room Mr. Bosengate sat at his wide-open window, smoking a cigarette; there was no light. Moths went past, the moon was creeping up. He sat very calm, puffing the smoke out into the night air. Curious thing—life! Curious world! Curious forces in it—making one do the opposite of what one wished; always—always making one do the opposite, it seemed! The furtive light from that creeping moon was getting hold of things down there, stealing in among the boughs of the trees. 'There's something ironical,' he thought, 'which walks about. Things don't come off as you think they will. I meant, I tried—but one doesn't change like that all of a sudden, it seems. Fact is, life's too big a thing for one! All the same, I'm not the man I was yesterday—not quite!' He closed his eyes, and in one of those flashes of vision which come when the senses are at rest, he saw himself as it were far down below—down on the floor of a street narrow as a grave, high as a mountain, a deep dark slit of a street—walking down there, a black midget of a fellow, among other black midgets—his wife, and the little soldier, the judge, and those jury chaps—*fantoches* straight up on their tiny feet, wandering down there in that dark, infinitely tall, and narrow street. 'Too much for one!' he thought; 'Too high for one—no getting on top of it. We've got

to be kind, and help one another, and not expect too much, and not think too much. That's—all!' And, squeezing out his cigarette, he took six deep breaths of the night air, and got into bed.

1916.

A FEUD

ITS psychic origin, like that of most human loves and hates, was obscure, and yet, like most human hates and loves, had a definite point of physical departure—the moment when Bowden's yellow dog bit Steer's ungaitered leg. Even then it might not have "got going" as they say, but for the village sense of justice which caused Steer to bring his gun next day and solemnly execute the dog. He was the third person the dog had bitten; not even Bowden, who was fond of his whippet, opposed the execution, but the shot left him with an obscure feeling of lost property, a dim sense of disloyalty to his dog. Steer was a Northerner, an Easterner, a man from a part called Lincolnshire, outlandish like the Frisian cattle he mixed with the Devons on his farm—this, Bowden could not help feeling in the bottom of his soul, was what had moved his dog. Snip had not liked, any more than his master, that thin, spry, red-grey-bearded chap's experimental ways of farming, his habit of always being an hour, a week, a month earlier than Bowden; had not liked his

lean, dry activity, his thin legs, his east-wind air. Bowden knew that he would have shot Steer's dog if he himself had been the third person Steer's dog had bitten; but then Steer's dog had *not* bitten Bowden, and Bowden's dog *had* bitten Steer; and this seemed to Bowden to show that his dog knew what was what. And while he was burying the poor brute he had muttered: "Darn the man! What did he want trapesin' about my yard in his Sunday breeks—seein' what he could get, I suppose!" And with each shovel of earth he threw on the limp yellow body, a sticky resentment had oozed from his spirit and clung, undissolving, round the springs of its action.

To inter the dog properly was a long hot job.

'He comes and shoots my dog—of a Sunday too, and leaves me to bury 'un,' he thought, wiping his round, well-coloured face; and he spat as if the ground in front of him were Steer.

When he had finished and rolled a big stone on to the little mound, he went in, and sitting down moodily in the kitchen, said:

"Girl, draw me a glass o' cider." Having drunk it, he looked up and added: "I've a-burried she up to Crossovers." The dog was male, a lissome whippet unconnected with the business of the farm, and Bowden had called him "she" from puppyhood. The dark-haired, broad-faced, rather

sullen-looking girl whom he addressed flushed, and her grey eyes widened with pain. "'Twas a shame!" she muttered.

"Ah!" said Bowden.

Bowden farmed about a hundred acres of half-and-half sort of land, some good, some poor, just under the down. He was a widower, with a mother and an only son. A broad easy man, with a dark round head, a rosy face, and immense capacity for living in the moment. Looking at him, you would have said not a man in whom things would rankle. But then to look at a West-countryman you would say so many things that have their lurking negations. He was a native of the natives—his family went back in the parish to times beyond the opening of the register; his ancestors had been churchwardens in remote days. His father, "Daddy Bowden," an easy-going, handsome old fellow, and a bit of a rip, had died at ninety. He himself was well over fifty, but had no grey hair as yet. He took life easy, and let his farm off lightly, keeping it nearly all to pasture, with a conservative grin (Bowden was a Liberal) at the outlandish efforts of his neighbour Steer (a Tory), to grow wheat, bring in Frisian stock, and use new-fangled machines. Steer had originally come to that part of the country as a gentleman's bailiff, and this induced a sort of se-

cret contempt in Bowden, whose forefathers in old days had farmed their own land here round about. Bowden's mother, eighty-eight years old, was a little pocket-woman almost past speech, with dark bright eyes and innumerable wrinkles, who sat all day long in any warmth there was, conserving energy. His son Ned, a youth of twenty-four, bullet-headed like all the Bowdens, was of a lighter colour in hair and eyes. At the moment of history, when Steer shot Bowden's dog, he was keeping company with Steer's niece, Molly Winch, who kept house for the confirmed bachelor that Steer was. The other member of Bowden's household, the girl Pansy, was an orphan, some said born under a rose, who came from the other side of the moor and earned fourteen pounds a year. She kept to herself, had dark fine hair, grey eyes, a pale broad face; "broody" she was, given somewhat to the "tantrums"; now she would look quite plain; now, when moved or excited, quite pretty. Hers was all the housework, and much of the poultry-feeding, wood-cutting and water-drawing. She was hard-worked, and often sullen because of it.

Having finished his cider, Bowden stood in the kitchen porch looking idly at a dance of gnats. The weather was fine, and the hay was in. It was one of those intervals between harvests which he

was wont to take easy, and it would amuse him to think of his neighbour always "puzzivanting" over some "improvement" or other. But it did not amuse him this evening. That chap was for ever trying to sneak ahead of his neighbours! Young Bowden had just milked the cows, and was turning them down the lane. The lad would "slick himself up" and go courting that niece of Steer's! The courtship seemed to Bowden suddenly unnatural. A cough made him conscious of the girl Pansy standing behind him with her sleeves rolled up.

"Butiful evenin'," he said—"gude for the corn." When Bowden indulged his sense of the æsthetic he would apologise with some comment that implied commercial benefit or loss; while Steer would pass on with only a dry "Fine evenin'." In talking with Steer one never lost consciousness of his keen "on-the-makeness," as of a progressive individualist who has no means of covering his nature from one's eyes. Bowden one might meet for weeks without realising that beneath his uncontradictious pleasantry was a self-preservative individualism quite as stubborn. To the casual eye Steer was much more up to date and "civilised"; to one looking deeper, Bowden had been "civilised" much longer. He had grown protective covering in a softer climate,

or drawn it outward from an older strain of blood.

"The gnats are dancin'," he said; "fine weather," and the girl Pansy nodded. Watching her turn the handle of the separator, he marked her glance straying down the yard to where Ned was shutting the lane gate. She was a likely-looking wench, with her shapely browned arms, and her black hair fine as silk, which she kept brushing back from her eyes with her free hand, and it gave him a kind of farmyard amusement to see those eyes of hers following his son about. 'She's Ned's if he wants her—young hussy!' he thought. 'Begad, but it would put Steer's nose out of joint properly, if that girl got in front of his precious niece.' To say that this thought was father to a wish would too definitely express the circumambulatory mind of Bowden—a lazy and unprecise thinker; but it lurked and hovered while he took his ash-plant and browsed his way out of the yard, to have a look at the young bull before supper. At the meadow of coarse water-weed and pasture, where the young red bull was grazing, he stood leaning over the gate, with the swallows flying high. The young bull was "lukin'-up bravely"—in another year he would lay over that bull of Steer's—ah, he would that! And a dim savagery stirred in

Bowden, then passed in the sensuous enjoyment —which a farmer never admits—at the scent, sight, sounds of his fields in fine weather; at the blue above and the green beneath him, the gleam of that thread of water, half-smothered in bulrushes, "daggers," and monkey-flower under the slowly sinking sun; at the song of a lark, and the murmuring in the ash-trees; at the glistening ruddy coat of the young bull and the sound of his cropping. Three rabbits ran into the hedge. So that fellow had shot his dog—his dog that had nipped up more rabbits out of corn than any dog he ever owned! He tapped his stick on the gate. The young bull raised a lazy head, gazed at his master, and, flicking his tail at the flies, resumed his pasturing.

'Shot my dog!' thought Bowden. 'Shot my dog! Yu wait a bit!'

II

The girl Pansy turned the handle of the separator, and its whining drone mixed with the thoughts and feelings, poignant yet formless, of one who had little say in her own career. There was an ache in her loins, for hay harvest was ever a hard week; and an ache in her heart, because she had no leisure, like Molly Winch and other

girls who could find time for the piano and to make their dresses. She touched her hard frieze skirt. She was sick of the ugly thing! And she hastened the separator. She had to feed the calves, and set the supper, before she could change into her Sunday frock and go to evening church—her one weekly festivity. Ned Bowden! Her fancy soared to the monstrous extravagance of herself and Ned walking across the fields to church together, singing out of one hymn-book; Ned, who had given her a look when he passed just now as if he realised at last that she had been thinking of him for weeks. A dusky flush crept up in her pale cheeks. A girl must think of somebody—she wasn't old Mother Bowden, with her hands on her lap all day, in sunlight or fire-shine, content just to be warm! And she turned the handle with a sort of frenzy. Would the milk never finish running through? Ned never saw her in her frock—her frock sprigged with cornflowers; he went off too early to his courting, Sunday evenings. In this old skirt she looked so thick and muddy! And her arms——! Gazing despairingly at arms browned and roughened, her fancy took another monstrous flight. She saw herself and Molly Winch side by side ungarbed. Ah, she would make two of that Molly Winch! The thought at once pained and pleased her. It was

genteel to be thin and elegant; and yet—instinct told her—strength and firmness of flesh had been desirable before ever gentility existed. She let the handle go, and, lifting the pail of "waste," hurried down with it to the dark byre, whence the young calves were thrusting their red muzzles. She pushed them back in turn—greedy little things; smacking their wet noses, scolding them. Ugh! How mucky it was in there—they ought to give that byre a good clean-up! She could barely wait for them to finish their drink, one by one—little slow, eager things—such was the longing in her to be in time this evening; then, banging down the empty pail, she ran to set out supper on the long deal table. In the last of the sunlight old Mother Bowden's bright eyes seemed to watch her inhumanly. She would never be done in time—never be done in time!

The beef, the cider, the cheese, the bread, the pickles—what else? Lettuce! Yes, and it wasn't washed, and Bowden loved his lettuce! But she couldn't wait—she couldn't! Perhaps he'd forget it—if she put some cream out! From the cool dark dairy, down the little stone passage, she fetched the remains of the scalded cream.

"Watch the cat, Missis Bowden!" And she ran up the wriggling narrow stairs.

The room she slept in was like a ship's cabin—

no bigger. She drew the curtain over the porthole-like window, tore off her things and flung them on the narrow bed. This was her weekly change. There was a hole in her undergarment, and she tore it wider in her hurry. 'I won't have time for a good wash,' she thought. Taking her one towel, she damped it, rubbed it over her, and began to dress furiously. The church bell had begun its dull, hard single chime. The little room was fiery hot, and beads of sweat stood on the girl's brow. Savagely she thought: 'Why can't I have time to be cool, like Molly Winch?' A large spider, a little way out from one corner of the ceiling, seemed watching her, and she shuddered. She couldn't bear spiders—great hairy things! But she had no time to stretch up her hand and kill it. Glancing through a chink left by the drawn curtain, to see whether Ned had come down into the yard, she snatched up her powder-puff—precious possession, nearest approach to gentility—and solemnly rubbed it over face and neck. Now she wouldn't shine, any way! She fastened on her Sunday hat, a broad-brimmed straw, trimmed with wide-eyed artificial daisies; and stood a moment contemplating her image in a mirror the size of her two hands. The scent of the powder, as of gone-off violets, soothed her nerves. But why was her hair so fine that it wouldn't stay in

place?—and why black, instead of goldeny-brown like Molly Winch's hair? Her lip drooped —her eyes looked wide and mournful in the glass. She snatched up her pair of dirty white cotton gloves, took her prayer-book, threw open the door, and stood listening. Dead silence in the house! Ned Bowden's room, with his father's and his old grandmother's, were up the other stairs. She would have liked him to see her coming down—like what the young men did in the magazines, looking up at the young ladies beautiful and cool, descending slowly. But would he look at her when he had his best on, going to Molly Winch? She went down the wriggling staircase. Gnats were still dancing outside the porch, ducks bathing and preening their feathers in sunlight which had lost all sting. She did not sit down, for fear of being caught too obviously waiting, but stood changing from tired foot to foot, while the scent of powder mingled queerly with the homely odour of the farmyard and the lingering perfume of the hay stacked up close by. The bell stopped ringing. Should she wait? Perhaps he wasn't going to church at all: just going to sit with Molly Winch, or to walk in the lanes with her. Oh, no, that Molly Winch was too prim and proper; she wouldn't miss church! And suddenly something stirred within the girl. What would *she* not miss

for a walk in the lanes with Ned? It wasn't fair! Some people had everything! The sound of heavy boots from stair to stair came to her ears, and more swiftly than one would have thought natural to that firm body, she sped through the yard and passed through the door in its high wall to the field path. Scarcely more than a rut, it was strewn with wisps of hay, for they had not yet raked this last field, and the air smelled very sweet. She dawdled, every sense throbbing, aware of his approach behind her, and its measured dwelling on either foot which no Bowden could abandon, even when late for church. He ranged up; his hair was greased, his square figure stuffed handsome into board-like Sunday dittos. His red face shone from soap, his grey eyes shone from surplus energy. From head to foot—he was wonderful! Would he pass her, or fall in alongside? He fell into step. The girl's heart thumped, her cheeks burned under the powder, so that the scent thereof was released. Young Bowden's arm, that felt like iron, bumped her own, and at the thrill which went through her, she half-closed her eyes.

"I reckon we're tu late," he said.

Her widened eyes challenged his stare.

"Don't you want to see Molly Winch, then?"

"No, I don't want any words about that dog."

Quick to see her chance, the girl exclaimed:

"'Twas a shame—it was; but she'd think more of her uncle's leg than of 'im, I know."

Again his arm pressed hers; he said: "Let's go down into the brake."

The bit of common land below the field was high with furze, where a few brown-gold blossoms were still clinging. A late cuckoo called shrilly from an ash-tree below. The breeze stirred a faint rustling out of the hedge-row trees. Young Bowden sat down among the knee-high bracken that smelled of sap, and put his arm about her.

III

In parishes whose farms are scattered and there is no real village, gossip has not quite its proper wings; and the first intimation Steer had that his niece was being slighted came from Bowden himself. Steer was wont to drive the seven miles to market in a small spring cart filled with produce on the journey in, and with groceries on the journey out. He held his east-wind face steadily, with eyes fixed on the ears of his mare. His niece sometimes sat beside him—one of those girls whose china is a little too thin for farm life. She was educated, and played the piano. Steer was proud of her, in spite of his low opinion of her

father, who had died of consumption and left Steer's sister in poor circumstances and health. Molly Winch's face, indeed, had refinement; it coloured easily a faint rose-pink, was pointed in the chin, had a slightly tip-tilted nose, and pretty, truthful eyes—a nice face.

Steer's mare usually did the seven miles in just under forty minutes, and he was proud of her, especially when she overhauled Bowden's mare. The two spring carts travelled abreast of each other just long enough for these words to be exchanged:

"Mornin', Bowden!"

"Mornin'!—mornin', Miss Molly, 'aven't seen yu lately; thought yu were visitin'!"

"No, Mr. Bowden."

"Glad to see yu lukin' up s'well. Reckon Ned's tu busy elsewhere just now."

It was then that Steer's mare drew well ahead.

'My old mare's worth two of his,' Steer thought.

Bowden's cart was distant dust before he turned to his niece and said:

"What's the matter with Ned Bowden? When did you see him last?"

His shrewd light eyes noted her lips quivering, and the stain on her cheeks.

"It's—it's a month now."

"It is—is it?" was all Steer said. But he flicked the mare sharply with his whip, thinking: 'What's this? Didn't like that fellow's face—was he makin' game of us?'

Steer was an abstemious man; a tot of sloe gin before he embarked for home was the extent of his usual potations at "The Drake." But that day he took two tots, because of the grin on the face of Bowden, who would sit an hour and more after he had gone, absorbing gin and cider. Was that grin meant for him and for his niece?

A discreet man, too, he let a fortnight pass while he watched out. Ned Bowden did not come to church, nor was he seen at Steer's. Molly looked pale and peaky. And something deep stirred in Steer. 'If he don't mean to keep his word to her,' he thought, 'I'll have the law of him, young pup!'

People talked no more freely to Steer, than he to them; and another week had passed before he had fresh evidence. It came, after a parish meeting, from the schoolmistress, a grey-haired single lady much respected.

"I don't like Molly looking so pale and daverdy, Mr. Steer; I'm grieved about Ned Bowden—I thought he was a steady boy."

"What about him?"

"That girl at Bowden's."

Steer flopped into the depths of consciousness. So everybody round had known, maybe for weeks, that his niece was being jilted for that cross-bred slut; known, and been grinning up their sleeves, had they? He announced to his niece that evening:

"I'm goin' round to Bowden's."

She coloured, then went pale.

"They shan't put it up on you," he said, "I'll see to that. Give me that ring of his—I may want it."

Molly Winch silently slipped off her amethyst engagement ring and gave it him.

Steer put on his best hat, breeches and gaiters, took a thin stick and set out.

Corn harvest was coming near, and he crossed a field of his own wheat into a field of Bowden's oats. Steer was the only farmer round about who grew wheat. Wheat! In Bowden's view it was all his politics! But Steer was thinking: 'My wheat's lookin' well—don't think much of these oats' (another of his foreign expressions, for oats were "corn" to Bowden); 'he'll have no straw.'

He had not been in Bowden's yard since the day he executed the yellow whippet dog, and his calf twitched—the brute had given it a shrewd nip.

The girl Pansy opened the door to him. And,

seeing the flush rise into her pale cheeks, he thought, 'If I were to lay my stick across your back, you'd know it, my girl.'

Bowden had just finished his supper of bacon, beans, and cider, and was smoking his pipe before the embers of a wood fire. He did not get up, and there seemed to Steer something studied and insulting in the way he nodded to a chair. He sat down with his stick across his knees, while the girl went quickly out.

"Butiful evenin'," said Bowden. "Fine weather for the corn. Have a drink o' cider?"

Steer shook his head. The cautious man was making sure of his surroundings before he opened fire. Old Mrs. Bowden sat in her chair by the recessed fire, with her little old back turned to the room. Bowden's white-headed bobtail was stretched out with his chin on his paws; a yellow cat crouched, still as the Sphinx, with half-closed eyes; nothing else was alive, except the slow-ticking clock.

Steer held up the amethyst ring.

"See this!"

Undisturbed by meaning or emotion, Bowden turned his face slowly towards the ring.

"Ah! What about it?"

"'Twas given to my niece for a purpose. Is that purpose goin' to be fulfilled?"

"Tidden for me to say. Ask Ned."

Steer closed his hand, slightly covered with reddish hairs.

"I've heard tales," he said, "and if he don' mean to keep his word I'll have the law of him. I've always thought my niece a sight too good for him; but if he thinks he can put a slight on her he's reckoning without the cost—that's all."

Bowden blew out a cloud of smoke.

"Ned's a man grown."

"Do you abet him?"

Bowden turned his head lazily.

"Don't you come here bullying me." And again he puffed out a cloud of smoke. Its scent increased the resentment in Steer, who was no smoker.

"Like father, like son," he said. "We know what *your* father was like."

Bowden took his pipe from his mouth with a fist the size of a beefsteak.

"With the old lady settin' there! Get out o' my house!"

A wave of exasperated blood flooded Steer's thin cheeks.

"You know right well that she hears naught."

Bowden replaced his pipe. "'Tes no yuse tachin' yu manners," he muttered.

Something twitched in Steer's lean throat,

where the reddish-grey hair covered his Adam's apple.

"I'll give your son a week, and then look out."

A chuckle pursued him to the door.

'All right!' he thought. 'We'll see who'll laugh last.'

IV

Difficult to say whether morality exists in a man like Bowden, whose blood is racy of the soil, and whose farmyard is so adjacent. That his son should run riot with the girl Pansy would have struck him more, perhaps, if Steer had not shot his dog—the affair so providentially put that fellow's nose out of joint. It went far, in fact, to assuage his outraged sense of property, and to dull the feeling that he had betrayed his dog by not actively opposing village justice. As for the "Law," the Bowdens had lived for too many generations in a parish where no constable was resident to have any real belief in its powers. He often broke the law himself in a quiet way—shooting stray pheasants and calling them pigeons, not inspecting his rabbit-traps morning and evening, not keeping quite to date in dipping his sheep, and so forth. "The Law" could always be evaded. Besides, what law was Ned breaking? That was Steer's talk!

He was contemptuously surprised, therefore, when, three weeks later, Ned received a document headed "High Courts of Justice. Winch *versus* Bowden," claiming five hundred pounds for breach of promise of marriage. An outlandish trick—with the war on, too! Couldn't Ned please himself as to what girl he'd take? He was for putting it in the fire. But the more the two examined the document the more hypnotised they became. Lawyers were no use except to charge money—but, perhaps a lawyer ought to have a look at it.

On market day, therefore, they took it to Applewhite, of Applewhite and Carter, who subjected them to a prolonged catechism. Had Ned engaged himself to the girl? Well, yes, he supposed he had. How had he broken off the engagement—he had written to the girl? No! Well, he had received letters from her asking him what was the matter? Yes, two. Had he answered them? No. Had he seen the girl and done it by word of mouth? No! He had not seen the girl for ten weeks. Was he prepared to see the girl or write to her? He was not. Was he ready to marry her? No! Why was that?

Ned looked at his father; and Bowden looked at Ned. The girl Pansy had never been mentioned between them.

Mr. Applewhite repeated his question. Ned did not know.

According to the lawyer, if Ned did not know, nobody did. What had caused the change in his feelings?

It was Bowden who answered——

"He shot my dog."

"Who?"

"Steer."

Mr. Applewhite was unable to see the connection. If that was all, he was afraid young Mr. Bowden would either have to marry the girl or "stand to be shot at" himself. And suddenly he looked at Ned. "Is there anything against this girl?" No, there was nothing against her.

"Then why not marry her?"

Again Ned shook his bullet head.

The lawyer smoothed his chin—he was a pleasant fellow—and a good fisherman.

"About this young lady, Miss Winch; excuse my asking, but I suppose you haven't been putting the cart before the horse?"

For the third time Ned shook his head.

No, there had been nothing of that sort. He did not add that if there had he might not have been overmastered by the propinquity of the girl Pansy.

"There's another girl in this, I suppose," said

the lawyer suddenly. "Well, I don't want to hear. It's for you to decide what you'll do—marry the girl, or defend the action and get the damages reduced—it's a stiff claim. You and your father had better go away, talk it over again, and let me know. If you defend, you'll have to go up to London. In the box, least said is soonest mended. You'll simply say you found you were mistaken, and thought it more honourable to break off at once than to go on. That sometimes goes down rather well with juries, if the man looks straightforward."

The Bowdens went away. Steer passed them on the journey home. He was alone, driving that mare of his. The Bowdens grinned faintly as he went by. Then Bowden called out two words——

"Stickin' plaster!"

If Steer heard, he gave no sign, but his ears looked very red.

When his hurrying cart was a speck at the top of the steep rise, Bowden turned a little towards his son.

"I want to make that chap sweat," he said.

"Ah!" answered Ned.

But how to make Steer sweat without sweating themselves? That was what exercised the Bowdens, each according to his lights and circumstances, which, of course, were very different.

Even in this quandary they did not mention the girl Pansy. To do so would have been to touch on feeling; both felt it better to keep to facts and to devices. It was Bowden who put the finishing touch to a long and devious silence.

"If yu don' du nothin', Ned, I don' see how they can 'ave yu. Yu've not putt nothin' on paper. How'm they to tell yu don' mean to marry her? I'd let 'em stew in their own juice. Don't yu never admit it. Drop word to that lawyer chap that yu'm not guilty."

Ned nodded, but underneath his stolidity he could not help feeling that it was not so simple as all that. To him, though not yet quite tired of the girl Pansy, his first choice had begun to be faintly desirable again—her refinement "in the distance enchanted," was regaining some of its attraction to his cooling blood. What would have been the course of events but for Steer's next action is, indeed, uncertain.

V

In having the law of "those two fellows," Steer had passed through an experience with his niece which had considerably embittered feelings already acid. The girl had shown a "lady-like" shrinking from pressing a man who had ceased

to want her. There was an absolute difference between her wishes and her uncle's. He would not have young Bowden marry her for anything; he just wanted revenge on the Bowdens. She wanted young Bowden still; but if she couldn't get him, would cry quietly and leave it at that. The two points of view had been irreconcilable, till Steer, taking the bit between his teeth, assured his niece that to bring the action was the only way of inducing young Bowden to come back to her. This gave him a bad conscience, for he was fond of his niece, and he really felt that to bring the action would make that fellow Bowden stick his toes in all the more, and refuse to budge. He thought always of Bowden first and of the five hundred that would come out of *his* pocket, not out of Ned's.

Steer owned the local weed-sprayer, which by village custom was at the service of his neighbours in rotation. This year he fetched the sprayer back from Pethick's farm just as it was on the point of going on to Bowden's, without reason given. Bowden, who would not have been above using "that chap's sprayer" so long as it came to him from Pethick, in ordinary rotation, was above sending to Steer's for it. He took the action as a public proclamation of enmity, and in the Three Stars Inn, where he went nearly

every evening for a glass of cider with a drop of gin and a clove in it, he said out loud that Steer was a "colley," and Ned wouldn't be seen dead with that niece of his.

By those words, soon repeated far and wide, he committed his son just when Ned was cooling rapidly towards the girl Pansy, and beginning to think of going to church once more and seeing whether Molly wouldn't look at him again. After all, it was he, not his father, who would have to go into the witness box; moreover, he had nothing against Molly Winch.

Now that the feud was openly recognised by village tongues, its origin was already lost. No one—hardly even the Bowdens—remembered that Bowden's dog had bitten Steer, and Steer had shot it; so much spicier on the palate was Ned's aberration with the girl Pansy, and its questionable consequences. Corn harvest passed, and bracken harvest; the autumn gales, sweeping in from the Atlantic, spent their rain on the moor; the birch-trees goldened and the beech-trees grew fox-red, and, save that Molly Winch was never seen, that Bowden and Steer passed each other as if they were stocks or stones, and for the interest taken in the girl Pansy's appearance by anyone who had a glimpse of her (not often now, for she was seldom out of the farm-

yard), the affair might have been considered at an end.

Steer was too secretive and too deadly in earnest to mention the breach-of-promise suit; the Bowdens, at once too defiant of the law and too anxious to forget it. By never mentioning it, even to each other, and by such occasional remarks as: "Reckon that chap's bit off more than he can chu," they consigned it to a future which to certain temperaments never exists until it is the present. They had, indeed, one or two legal reminders, and Ned had twice to see Mr. Applewhite on market days, but between all this and real apprehension was always the slow and stolid confidence that "the Law" could be avoided if you "sat tight and didn' du nothin'."

When, therefore, in late November, Ned received a letter from the lawyer telling him to be at the High Courts of Justice in the Strand, London, at ten-thirty in the morning on the next day but one, prepared to give his evidence, a most peculiar change took place in that bullet-headed youth. His appetite abandoned him; sweat stood on his brow at moments unconnected with honest toil. He gave the girl Pansy black looks; and sat with his prepared evidence before him, wiping the palms of his hands stealthily on his breeches. That which he had never really thought

would spring was upon him after all, and panic, such as nothing physical could have caused in him, tweaked his nerves, and paralysed his brain. But for his father he would never have come up to the scratch. Born before the halfpenny Press, and unable to ride a bicycle, unthreatened, moreover, by the witness-box, Bowden—after a long pipe—gave out his opinion that it "widden never du to let that chap 'ave it all his own way. There wasn't nothin' to it, if Ned kept a stiff upper lip. 'Twid be an 'oliday-like in London for them both."

So, dressed in their darkest and most board-like tweeds, with black bowler hats, they drove in next day to catch the London train, with a small boy bobbing on a board behind them to drive the mare back home. Deep within each was a resentful feeling that this came of women; and they gave no thought to the feelings of the girl who was plaintiff in the suit, or of the girl who watched them drive out of the yard. While the train swiftly bore them, stolid and red-faced, side by side, the feeling grew within them that to make a holiday of this would spite that chap Steer. He wanted to make them sweat; if they did not choose to sweat—it was one in the eye for him.

They put up at an hotel with a Devonshire

name in Covent Garden, and in the evening visited a music-hall where was a show called the "Rooshian Ballet." They sat a little forward with their hands on their thighs, their ruddy faces, expressionless as waxworks, directed towards the stage, whereon "Les Sylphides" were floating white and ethereal. When the leading *danseuse* was held upside down, Bowden's mouth opened slightly. He was afterwards heard to say that she had "got some legs on her." Unable to obtain refreshment after the performance, owing to the war, they sought the large flasks in their bedroom, and slept, snoring soundly, as though to express even in their slumbers a contempt for the machinations of "that chap, Steer."

VI

Though sorely tried by the "pernickety" nature of his niece, Steer had been borne up by the thought that he had only to hold on a little longer to obtain justice. How he had got her to the starting-post he really did not know, so pitiably had she "jibbed." The conviction that good solid damages would in the end be better for her than anything else had salved and soothed a conscience really affected by her nervous distress. Her pale face and reddened eyes on the way to

the court disturbed him, and yet he knew they were valuable—she was looking her best for the occasion. It would be all over—he told her—in an hour, and then she should go to the seaside—what did she say to Weston-super-Mare (with one syllable)? She said nothing, and he had entered the Law Courts with his arm through hers, and his upper lip very long. The sight of the two Bowdens seated on a bench in the corridor restored the burning in his heart. He marked his niece's eyes slide round when they passed young Bowden. Yes! She would take him even now! He saw Ned shuffle his feet, and Bowden grin, and he hurried her on—not for anything would he forego the five hundred out of that fellow's pocket! At that moment the feud between him and his neighbour showed naked—those young people were but the catspaws of it. The custom of the court compelled them all presently to be sitting in a row, divided faction from faction by not more than the breadth of a pig. Steer's thin face, racked by effort to follow the patter of the chap in a wig, acquired a sort of maniacal fixity; but he kept hold of his niece's arm, squeezing it half-consciously now and again, and aware of her shrinking faint look. As for "those two fellows," they sat as they might have at an auction, giving nothing away, putting the whole business in its

proper place—monkey tricks that must fail if they "sat tight and didn' du nothin'." It seemed unjust to Steer that they should seem unmoved while his niece was wilting beside him. When she went up, trembling, into the "dock," a strong scent of camphor floated from Steer, stirred from his clothes by the heat within him. He could hardly hear her, and they kept telling her to speak up. He saw tears roll down her cheeks; and the ginger in his greying hair and beard brightened the while he stared at the Bowdens, who never moved. They didn't ask her much—not even Bowden's counsel—afraid to, he could see! And, vaguely through his anger and discomfort, Steer felt that, with her "ladylikeness," her tears, her shrinking, she was making a good impression on judge and jury. It enraged him to see her made to shrink and weep, but it delighted him too.

She came back to his side and sat down, all shrunk into herself. Bowden's counsel began outlining the defence, and Steer listened with his mouth a little open—an outrageous defence, for what did it amount to but a confession that the fellow had played fast and loose! His client—said counsel—came into court not to defend this action, but to express his regret as an honourable man for having caused the plaintiff distress,

though not, he would submit, any material damage, for, now that they had seen her in the box, it would be absurd to suppose that what was called her "value in the marriage market" had deteriorated. His client had come there to tell them the simple truth that, finding his feelings towards the plaintiff changed, he had considered it more honourable, wise and merciful, to renounce his engagement before it was too late, rather than to enter into a union from the start doomed to unhappiness, which, the gentlemen of the jury must remember, would, in the nature of men and things, fall far more heavily on the plaintiff than on the defendant himself. Though fully admitting his responsibility for the mistake he had made and the hastiness of which he had been guilty, the defendant believed they would give him credit for his moral courage in stopping before it was too late, and saving the plaintiff from a miserable fiasco.

At the words "moral courage," Steer had righted himself in his seat so suddenly that the judge was seen to blink. "Moral courage!" Wasn't anybody going to tell those dodos there that the fellow had been playing the rip with that cross-bred girl? Wasn't anybody going to tell them that Bowden had put his son up to this to spite him—Steer? A sense of mystification and

falsity muddled and enraged him; it was all bluff and blarney, like selling a horse.

With the robust common-sense characteristic —counsel went on—of plain and honest men, the jury would realise that one could not have things both ways in this world—however it might be in the next. The sad records of the Divorce Court showed what was the outcome of hasty and ill-considered marriages. They gave one to think furiously, indeed, whether these actions for breach of promise, with their threat of publicity, were not responsible for much of the work of that dismal tribunal. He would submit that where you had, as here, a young man admitting his error and regretting it, yet manly enough to face this ordeal in order to save the plaintiff—and in less degree himself, of course—from a life of misery, that young man was entitled, if not to credit, at least to just and considerate treatment at the hands of his fellow-citizens, who had themselves all been young, and, perhaps, not always as wise as Solomon. Let them remember what young blood was—a sunny lane in that beautiful Western county, the scent of honeysuckle, a pretty girl—and then let them lay their hands on their hearts and say that they themselves might not have mistaken the emotions of a moment for a lifelong feeling.

"Don't let us be hypocrites, gentlemen, and pretend that we always carry out that to which in moments of midsummer madness we commit ourselves. My client will tell you quite simply, for he is a simple country youth, that he just made a mistake, which no one regrets more than he, and then I shall leave it in your hands—confident that, sorry as we all are for the disappointment of this charming girl, you will assess the real values of the case with the instinct of shrewd and understanding men."

"Well, I'm darned!"

"H'sh! Silence in the Court!"

The mutter, which had been riven from Steer by counsel's closing words, by no means adequately expressed feelings which grew with every monosyllable from that "young ruffian" answering the cunning questions of his advocate.

With his sleek bullet-head he looked sheepish enough, but the thing was being made so easy for him—that was what seemed villainous to Steer, that and the sight of Bowden's face, unmoved, the breadth of two pigs away. When his own counsel began to cross-examine, Steer became conscious that he had made a hideous mistake. Why had he not caused his lawyer to drag in the girl Pansy? What on earth had he been about to

let his natural secretiveness, his pride in his niece, prevent him using the weapon which would have alienated every sympathy from that young rascal? He tingled with disappointed anger. So the fellow was not to be shown up properly! It was outrageous. And then suddenly his ears pricked. "Now, young man," counsel was saying, "don't you think that in days like these you can serve your country better than by going about breaking girls' hearts? . . . Kindly answer that question! . . . Don't waste his Lordship's time. Yes? Speak up, please."

"I'm workin' the land—I'm growin' food for you to eat!"

"Indeed! The jury will draw their own conclusions as to what sort of leniency they can extend to a young man in your position."

Steer's lips relaxed. That was a nasty one!

Then came the speeches from counsel on both sides, and everything was said over again, but Steer had lost interest; disappointment nagged at him, as at a man who has meant to play a five innings—and gets out for seven. Now the Judge was saying everything that everybody had said and a little more besides. The jury must not let themselves this, and let themselves that. Defendant's counsel had alluded to the Divorce Court—they must not allow any such considera-

tion to weigh with them. While the law was what it was, breach-of-promise actions must be decided on their merits. They would consider this, and they would consider that, and return a verdict, and give damages according to their consciences. And out the jury filed. Steer felt lonely while they were absent. On one side of him were those Bowdens whom he wanted to make sweat; on the other his niece, whom, to judge from her face, he *had* made sweat. He was not a lover of animals, but a dog against his legs would have been a comfort during that long quarter of an hour, while those two enemies of his so stolidly stared before them. Then the jury came back, and the sentiment in his heart stuttered into a form he could have sent through the post. "Oh, Lord, make them sweat! Your humble servant, J. Steer."

"We find for the plaintiff, with damages—three hundred pounds."

Three hundred! And costs—with costs it would come to five! And Bowden had no capital; he was always on the edge of borrowing to get through—yes, it would push him hard! And, grasping his niece's arm, Steer rose and led her out by the right-hand door, while the Bowdens sought the left. In the corridor his lawyer came up. The fellow hadn't half done his job! And

Steer was about to say so, when those two passed, walking as though over turnips, and he heard Bowden say——

"Think he'll get that stickin'-plaster—let 'im wait an' see!"

He was about to answer, when the lawyer laid hold of his lapel.

"Get your niece away, Mr. Steer; she's had enough."

And, without sense of conquest, with nothing but a dull, irritable aching in his heart, Steer took her arm, and walked her out of the precincts of the law.

VII

The news that Ned Bowden had "joined up" reached the village simultaneously with the report that Steer had "shot" him in London for three hundred pounds and costs for breaking his promise to Molly Winch. The double sensation was delicious. Honours seemed so easy that no one could see which had come off best. It was fairly clear, however, that Molly Winch and the girl Pansy had come off worst. And there was great curiosity to see them. This was not found possible, for Molly Winch was at Weston-super-Mare and the girl Pansy invisible, even by those whose business took them to Bowden's yard.

Bowden himself put in his customary appearance at The Three Stars, where he said quite openly that Steer would never see a penny of that money; Steer his customary appearances at church, where he was a warden, and could naturally say nothing. Christmas passed, and the New Year wore on through colourless February and March, when every tree was bare, the bracken's russet had gone dark-dun, and the hedgerows were songless.

Steer's victory had lost him his niece; she had displayed invincible reluctance to return as a conquering heroine, and had gone into an office. Bowden's victory had lost him his son, whose training would soon be over now, and whose battalion was in Flanders. Neither of the neighbouring enemies showed by word or sign that they saw any connection between victory and loss; but the schoolmistress met them one afternoon at the end of March seated in their carts face to face in a lane so narrow that some compromise was essential to the passage of either. They had been there without movement long enough for their mares to begin grazing in the hedge on either hand. Bowden was sitting with folded arms and an expression as of his own bull on his face. Steer's teeth and eyes were bared very much like a dog's when it is going to bite.

The schoolmistress, who had courage, took hold of Bowden's mare and backed her.

"Now, Mr. Steer," she said, "pull in to your left, please. You can't stay here all day, blocking the lane for everybody."

Steer, who, after all, prized his reputation in the parish, jerked the reins and pulled into the hedge. And the schoolmistress, without more ado, led Bowden's mare past, foot by foot. The wheels scraped, both carts jolted slightly; the two farmers' faces, so close together, moved no muscle, but when the carts had drawn clear, each, as if by agreement, expectorated to his right. The schoolmistress loosed the head of Bowden's mare and said——

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Mr. Bowden; you and Mr. Steer."

"How's that?" said Bowden.

"How's that, indeed? Everybody knows the state of things between you. No good can come of it. In war-time, too, when we ought all to be united. Why can't you shake hands and be friends?"

Bowden laughed.

"Shake 'ands with that chap? I'd suner shake 'ands with a dead pig. Let 'im get my son back out o' the Army."

The schoolmistress looked up at him.

"Ah! I hope you're going to look after that poor girl when her time comes," she said.

Bowden nodded.

"Never fear! I'd suner my grandchild was hers than that niece of Steer's."

The schoolmistress was silent.

"Well," she said at last, "it's an unchristian state of mind."

"Yu go to Steer, Ma'am, an' see whether he'll be more Christianlike. He 'olds the plate out, Sundays."

This was precisely what the good lady did. More, perhaps, from curiosity than in a proselytising mood.

"What!" said Steer, who was installing a beehive. "When that God-darned fellow put his son up to jilting my niece!"

"And you a Christian, Mr. Steer!"

"There's a limit to that, Ma'am," said Steer drily. "In my opinion, not even our Lord could have put up with that chap. Don't you waste your breath trying to persuade me."

"Dear me!" murmured the schoolmistress; "I don't know which of you is worst."

The only people, in fact, who did know were Steer and Bowden, whose convictions about each other increased as the spring came in with song and leaf and sunshine, and there was no son to

attend to the sowing and the calving, and no niece to make the best butter in the parish.

Towards the end of May, on a "brave" day, when the wind was lively in the ash-trees, and the buttercups bright gold, the girl Pansy had her hour; and on the following morning Bowden received this letter from his son:

DEAR FATHER,

They don't let us tell where we are, so all I can say is there's some crumps come over that stop at nothing, and you could bury a wagon where they hit. The grub is nothing to complain of. Hope you have done well with calves. The green there is within sight of here wouldn't keep a rabbit going half a day. The thing I wish to say is: If I have a son by you know who—call it Edward, after you and me. It makes you think out here. She would like to hear perhaps that I will marry her if I come back, so as not to have it on my mind. There is some German prisoners in our section—big fellows, and proper swine with their machine-guns, I can tell you. Hope you are well, as this leaves me. Has that swine Steer given over asking for his money? I would like to see the old farm again. Tell Granma to keep warm. No more now from Your loving son,

NED.

After standing for some minutes by the weighing-machine trying to make head or tail of his own sensations, Bowden took the letter up to the girl Pansy, lying beside her offspring in her narrow cabin of a room. In countrymen who never observe themselves, a letter or event which ploughs up fallow land of feeling, or blasts the rock of some prejudice, causes a prolonged mental stammer or hiatus. So Ned wanted to marry the girl if he came home! The Bowdens were an old family, the girl cross-bred. It wasn't fitting! And the news that Ned had it on his mind brought home to Bowden, as never before, the danger his son was in. With profound instinct he knew that compunction did not seriously visit those who felt life sure and strong within them; so that there was a kind of superstition in the way he took the letter up to the girl. After all, the child was as much bone of Ned's bone and of his own, as if the girl had been married in church —a boy too. He gave it her with the words: "Here's a present for yu and Edward the Seventh."

The village widow, accustomed to attend these simple cases, stepped outside, and while the girl was reading, Bowden sat down on the low seat beneath the little window. The ceiling just touched his head, so that he did not care to re-

main standing. Her coarse nightgown fell back from her strong arms and neck, her hair showed black and lustreless on the coarse pillow; he could not see her face for the letter, but he heard her sigh. Somehow he felt sorry.

"Shud ought to du yu good," he said.

Dropping the letter, so that her eyes met his, the girl spoke.

"Tisn' nothin' to me; Ned don't care for me no more."

Something inexpressibly cheerless in the tone of her voice, and uncannily searching in her dark gaze, disturbed Bowden.

"Cheer up!" he murmured; "yu've got a monstrous baby there, all to yureself."

Going up to the bed, he clucked his tongue, and held his finger out to the baby. He did it softly, and with a sort of native aptitude.

"He'm a proper little man." Then he took up the letter, for there "wasn't," he felt, "no yuse in leavin' it there against Ned if an' in case he should change his mind when he came safe 'ome." But, as he went out, he saw the girl Pansy put the baby to her breast, and again he felt that disturbance, as of pity. With a nod to the village widow, who was sitting on an empty grocery-box reading an old paper, by the light coming through half a skylight, Bowden descended the twisting

stairs to the kitchen. His mother was seated where the sunlight fell, her bright little dark eyes moving among their mass of wrinkles. Bowden stood a moment watching her.

"Well, Granny," he said, "y'um a great-granny now."

The old lady nodded, mumbled her lips a little in a smile, and rubbed one hand on the other. Bowden experienced a shock.

"There ain't no sense in et," he muttered to himself, without knowing too well what he meant.

VIII

Bowden did not attend when, three weeks later, the baby was christened Edward Bowden. He spent the June morning in his cart with a bull calf, taking it to market. The cart did not run well, because the weight of the calf made it jerk and dip. Though used to it all his life, he had never become quite case-hardened to separating calves from their mothers. Bowden had a queer feeling for cattle—more feeling, indeed, than he had for human beings. He always sat sulky when there was a little red beast tied up and swaying there behind him. Somehow he felt for it, as if in some previous existence he might himself have been a red bull calf.

Passing through a village someone called——

"'Eard the nus? They beat the Germans up proper yest'day mornin'."

Bowden nodded. News from the war was now nothing but a reminder of how that fellow Steer had deprived him of Ned's help and company. The war would be over some day, he supposed, but they didn't seem to get on with it, gaining ground one day and losing it the next, and all the time passing this law and that law interfering with the land. Didn't they know the land couldn't be interfered with—the cuckoos? Steer, of course, was all part of this interference with the land—the fellow grew wheat where anybody could have told him it couldn't be grown!

The day was hot, the road dusty, and that chap Steer hanging about the market like the colley he was—so that Bowden inbibed freely at "The Drake" before making a start for home.

When he entered his kitchen the newly christened baby was lying in a grocery box, padded with a pillow and shawl, just out of the sunlight in which old Mrs. Bowden sat moving her hands as if weaving a spell. Bowden's sheepdog had lodged its nose on the edge of the box, and was sniffing as if to ascertain the difference in the baby. In the background the girl Pansy moved on

her varying business; she looked strong again, but pale still, and "daverdy," Bowden thought. He stood beside the box contemplating the "monstrous" baby. It wasn't like Ned, nor anything, so far as he could see. It opened its large grey eyes while he stood there. That colley Steer would never have a grandchild, not even one born like this! The thought pleased him. He clucked to the baby with his tongue, and his sheepdog jealously thrust its head with mass of brushed-back snowy hair under his hand.

"Hullo!" said Bowden. "What's matter wi' yu?"

He went out presently, in the slanting sunlight, to look at some beasts he had on the rough ground below his fields, and the dog followed. Among the young bracken and the furze not yet in bloom again, he sat down on a stone. The afternoon was glorious beyond all words, now that the sun was low and its glamour had motion, as it were, and flight across the ash-trees, the hawthorn, and the fern. One May-tree close beside him was still freakishly in delicate flower, with a sweet and heavy scent; in the hedge the round, cream-coloured heads of the elder-flower flashed, flat against the glistening air, while the rowans up the gully had passed already from blossom to brown unrounded berries.

There was all the magic of transition from season to season, even in the song of the cuckoo, which flighted arrow-like to a thorn-tree up the rocky dingle, and started a shrill calling. Bowden counted his beasts, and marked the fine sheen on their red coats. He was drowsy from his hot day, from the cider he had drunk, and the hum of the flies in the fern. Unconsciously he enjoyed a deep and sensuous peace of warmth and beauty. Ned had said there was no green out there! It was unimaginable! No green—not the keep of a rabbit; not a curling young caterpillar-frond of fern; no green tree for a bird to light on! And Steer had sent him out there! Through his drowsiness that thought came flapping its black wings. Steer! who had no son to fight, who was making money hand over fist. It seemed to Bowden that a malevolent fortune protected that stingy chap, who couldn't even take his glass.

There were little blue flowers, speedwell and milkwort, growing plentifully in the rough grass around; Bowden noted, perhaps for the first time, that small natural luxury of which Steer had deprived his son by sending him to where no grass grew.

He rose at length, retracing his slow-lifted tread up the lane, deep-soiled with the dried dung of his cows, where innumerable gnats danced

level with the elder-blossom and the ash-leaves. He entered the yard as the village postman was leaving it. The man stopped in the doorway, and turned his red face, white head, and dark eyes blinking in the level sunlight.

"There's a talegram for yu, Mist Bowden," he said, and vanished.

"What's that?" said Bowden dully, and passed in under the porch.

The "talegram" lay unopened on the kitchen table, and Bowden stared at it. Very few such missives had come his way, perhaps not half-a-dozen in his fifty odd years. He took it up—handling it rather as he might have handled a fowl that would peck—and broke it open with his thumb.

"Greatly regret inform you your son killed in action on seventh instant. War Office."

He read it through again and again, before he sat down heavily, dropping it on the table. His round solid face looked still and blind, its mouth just a little open. The girl Pansy came up and stood beside him.

"Here!" he said; "read that."

The girl read it and put her hands up to her ears.

"That idn' no yuse," he said, with surprising quickness.

The girl's pale face crimsoned; she uttered a little wail and ran from the room.

In the whitewashed kitchen the only moving things were the clock's swinging pendulum and old Mrs. Bowden's restless eyes, close to the geranium on the window sill, where the last of the sunlight fell before passing behind the house. Minute after minute ticked away before Bowden made a movement—his head bowed, his shoulders rounded, his knees apart. Then he got up.

"God for ever darn the blasted colley!" he said slowly, gathering up the telegram. "Where's my stick?"

Lurching blindly he walked round the room, watched by the old woman's little dark bright eyes, and went out. He went at his unvaried gait on the path towards Steer's, slowly climbing the two stiles and emerging from the field into Steer's farmyard.

"Master in?" he said to the boy who stood by the cow-byre.

"No."

"Where is he then?"

"Not 'ome from market yet."

"Oh, he idden, idden he!"

And Bowden turned up into the lane. There was a dull buzzing in his ears, but his nostrils moved, savouring the evening scents, of grass, of

cow-dung, dried earth and hedgerow weeds. His nose was alive, the rest within him all knotted into a sort of bitter tangle round his heart. The blood beat in his temples, and he dwelled heavily on foot and foot. Along this road Steer must come in his cart—God for ever darn him! Beyond his own top pasture he reached the Inn abutting on the road. From the bench in there under the window he could see anyone who passed. The innkeeper and two labourers were all the company as yet. Bowden took his usual mug and sat down on the window seat. He did not speak of his loss, and they did not seem to know of it. He just sat with his eyes on the road. Now and then he responded to some question, now and then got up and had his mug refilled. Someone came in; he noted the lowering of voices. They were looking at him. They knew. But he sat on silent till the inn closed. It was still daylight when he lurched back up the road towards home, intent on not missing Steer. The sun had gone down; it was very still. He leaned against the wicket-gate of his top field. Nobody passed. Twilight crept up. The moon rose. An owl began hooting. Behind him in the field from a group of beech-trees the shadows stole out ever so faint in the flowery grass and darkened slowly in the brightening moonlight.

Bowden leaned his weight against the wood—

one knee crooked, and then the other—in dogged stupefaction. He had begun imagining things, but not very much. No grass, no trees, where his son had been killed, no birds, no animals; what could it be like—all mucky grey in the moonlight—and Ned's face all grey! So he would never see Ned's face any more! That colley, Steer—that colley, Steer! His dead son would never see and hear and smell his home again. Vicarious homesickness for this native soil and scent and sound—this nest of his fathers from time beyond measuring—swept over Bowden. He thought of the old time when his wife was alive and Ned was born. His wife—why! she had brought him six, and of the lot he had only "saved" Ned, and he was a twin. He remembered how he had told the doctor that he wasn't to worry about the "maiden" so long as he saved the boy. He had wanted the boy to come after him here; and now he was dead, and that—that colley, Steer!

He heard the sound of wheels—a long way off, but coming steadily. Gripping his stick he stood up straight, staring down the road all barred with moonlight and the dusk. Closer came the rumble, the clop-clop of hoofs, till the shape of horse and cart came out of darkness into a bright patch. Steer's right enough! Bowden opened his wicket-gate, and waited. The cart came slowly;

Bowden saw that the mare was lame, and Steer was leading her. He lurched a yard out from the gate.

"'Ere," he said, "I want to speak to yu. Come in 'ere!"

The moonlight fell on Steer's thin, bearded face.

"What's that?" he answered.

Bowden turned towards the gate.

"Hitch the mare up; I want to settle my account."

He saw Steer stand quite still, as if debating, then pass the reins over the gate. His voice came sharp and firm——

"Have you got that money, then?"

"Ah!" said Bowden, and drew back under the trees. He saw Steer coming cautiously—the colley—with a stick in his hand. He raised his own.

"That's for Ned," he said, and struck with all his might.

The blow fell short a little; Steer staggered back, raising his stick.

He struck again, but the sticks clashed, and, dropping his own, Bowden lurched at his enemy's throat. He had twice Steer's strength and bulk; half his lean quickness and sobriety. They swayed between the beech-trunks, now in shad-

ow, now in moonlight which greyed their faces, and showed the expression in their eyes, of men out to kill. They struggled chest against chest, striving to throw each other, with short, hard gruntings. They reeled against a trunk, staggered and unclinched, and stood, breathing hard, glaring at each other. All those months of hatred looked out of their eyes, and their hands twitched convulsively. Suddenly Steer went on his knees, and gripping Bowden's legs, strained at them, till the heavy, unsteady bulk pitched forward and fell over Steer's back with stunning weight. They rolled on the grass then, all mixed up, till they came apart, and sat facing each other, dazed—Bowden from the drink shaken up within him, Steer from the weight which had pitched upon his spine. They sat as if each knew there was no hurry and they were there to finish this; watching each other, bent a little forward, their legs stuck out in the moonlight, their mouths open, breathing in hard gasps, ridiculous —to each other! And suddenly the church bell began to toll. Its measured sound at first reached only the surface of Bowden's muddled brain, dully devising the next attack; then slid into the chambers of his consciousness. Tolling? Tolling! For whom? His hands fell by his sides. Impulse and inhibition, action and superstition, revenge

and mourning gripped each other and rolled about within him. A long minute passed. The bell tolled on. A whinny came from Steer's lame mare outside the gate. Suddenly Bowden staggered up, turned his back on his enemy, and, lurching in the moonlight, walked down the field for home. The clover among the wild grasses smelled sweet; he heard the sound of wheels—Steer had started again! Let him go! 'Twasn't no use—'twidden bring Ned back! He reached the yard door and stood leaning against it. Cold streaming moonlight filled the air, covered the fields; the pollarded aspens shivered above him; on the low rock-wall the striped roses were all strangely coloured; and a moth went by brushing his cheek.

Bowden lowered his head, as if butting at the beauty of the night. The bell had ceased to toll —no sound now but the shiver of the aspens, and the murmur of a stream. 'Twas monstrous peaceful—surely!

And in Bowden something went out. He had not the heart to hate.

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